

# BLOOD AND THUNDER



*By the same Author*

THE LAST ROMANTIC  
THE COWELLS IN AMERICA  
CLOWNS AND PANTOMIMES  
FAIRS, CIRCUSES AND MUSIC-HALLS  
GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH  
WINKLES AND CHAMPAGNE  
CLOWN, ETC.

**B L O O D**  
**AND**  
**T H U N D E R**

*MID-VICTORIAN MELODRAMA  
AND ITS ORIGINS*

*by*

*Maurice Willson Disher*

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## *Puff Preliminary*

ASTRONOMY can be studied in solitude. Knitting and botany likewise exist outside human vagaries. Any number of subjects can be added to the list. But when public entertainments are regarded with the coldly contemplative eye, it is time to object. They belong to the hurly-burly, not the academic spirit. In order to explain them, you need to explain yourself.

Here is a rash attempt to chart imagination according to the way it expresses itself in the melodrama of books, plays, actors, paintings, songs, operas, films and life. Read it, if you please, as though that imagination has been heavily engaged, like your own, in the struggle to grow up. Make some allowance for exasperating oddities. A new subject insists on being treated in a new way. This, as a history of universally popular fictions, can almost be said to be very nearly new.

What if you are surprised to find the biography of a historic personage as the clue to it? Fads are somewhat apt to start in one human life, and much more has been claimed for many a man than I claim for one woman. Other influences come, not like kings and queens in decent order, but lapping and overlapping, less like historic events than scales on a ruffled dragon's back. Make what you can of it. Or treat the whole thing as a joke.

M. W. D.



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## PROLOGUE

### *Popular imagination in melodrama and penny dreadful*

SOMEBODY once paid for his liquor at the village inn with a queer shilling. Ever since, it has been changing hands so regularly there that nobody dare snap it. Who could deny having passed it off as genuine at some time or another?

Spurious ideas are sometimes treated like that. One such is in the words "Virtue Triumphant". It came into currency unquestioned, was vouched for by responsible persons and could not be exposed as counterfeit without upsetting everybody's reckoning. Queer it undoubtedly is, for it has always been interpreted to mean, not a universal contempt for worldly advantages, but the reverse—a belief that virtue, though held to be its own reward, is not so unprofitable financially as might be supposed: in other words, piety can be made to pay, money and morals go hand in hand. Accordingly the mullenium is not to be when men cease from self-seeking, but when all men know they cannot be rich, nor even comfortably off, unless they heed the Ten Commandments. Since this is founded on the nursery teaching, "No pudding unless you're good", it satisfies the unthinking. It is troublesome to be reminded that virtue benefits no more from the success in life of the chaste and pious than truth becomes enriched when a hater of lying wins a fortune.

Biographies often argue that a warrior or an emperor took the wrong course. Novelettes demonstrate how their heroines err likewise. To accuse the whole world of such behaviour is not so simple. Nothing less is the object of this book; nothing less because it is the unavoidable consequence of recording the history



of that counterfeit idea. Humanity was hoodwinked by it for the better part of two centuries. Long denounced as sham, it still exists although broken.

Of course the title should be "Virtue Triumphant", but this has been worn so thin that nothing can be made of its image and superscription; it is a blur with too many possible meanings. The readiness of Nature or Providence to join in mortal brawls on the side of the just is announced more clearly by "Blood and Thunder", though why such very different words should amount to much the same thing needs explaining. The two phrases have become associated as terms of abuse against popular fiction. Melodramas on the stage and novels in all manner of forms, from the chap-book, the feuilleton, the novelette and the penny dreadful, paid unabashed tribute to the power of the heavens to preserve the chastity of heroines. Nor was this the only idea held in common. Authors in the trade had a stock-pot from which each drew out much and put in little or nothing. It was kept filled by the imagination of the masses which was, like the feelings of crowds, an entity. Authors were part of it. They were members of the audience, for what they wrote was what they had already heard and applauded. Any changes in plots reflect the changing times, not the difference between one brain and another, and times changed slowly. The original brew was Virtue Triumphant unadulterated. Blood and thunder were added to concoct a flavour that was but slightly affected by such later ingredients as mystery and terror, crime exultant, freedom from oppression, *la femme fatale*, religion and sex, all mingling whether they blended or not. Some difference in the brew may appear, according to what kind of ladle was dipped into it. Class consciousness causes these differences; they are not real. Popular imagination includes rich and poor alike. Self-interests do not clash: the rich like to imagine themselves poor, the poor like to imagine themselves dispossessed. There is, or was, a powerful uniformity of wishes.

Fashion comes into the story, first by making people affect virtue whether they had it or not, and then by dressing it up in particular shapes that were copied slavishly. What began at the beginning of the eighteenth century as a modish cult became an

intellectual bias which saw the triumph of virtue everywhere, not only in all human affairs, political as well as domestic, but in the firmament; not only as the fulfilling of personal destinies, but as the law of cosmos besides. Nature's partiality to the good was generally credited. Another century was to pass and still men of culture would speak (Hazlitt when attacking Shelley for having his own ideas) of "advancing the cause of science and virtue". It had become an established doctrine, accepted as truth upon which speculative theories could be based. It may be regarded now as a figment of popular imagination, but that it was regarded then as wisdom, intuitive knowledge no more to be questioned than revealed religion, is evident in the mental processes even of political economists. Fancy intruded into fact disastrously. Because the heavens were the sure shield of the virtuous, it were profanity to worry over thousands of little innocents enslaved in the factories and turned adrift to perish when labour, even as cheap as theirs, was not wanted.

Belief in Virtue Triumphant survived the exposure of this grim evil. Even in gaffs and saloons, melodrama so strongly insisted on the sure reward to be bestowed in this life upon the law-abiding that sociologists now see in this a Machiavellian plot to keep democracy servile to Church and State. Yet the very Grub Street hacks who showed their contempt for authority by criticizing the Queen and by being embarrassingly frank about sex, always respected Providence when they turned their pens to fiction. Democracy, including a large criminal class, sided fervently with virtue against vice in its entertainments. These, decidedly not servile, often excited feelings against what was lawful and made no bones about it, but though they criticized the Army and the Navy they never questioned Fate's ability to enter praise and blame in its books and balance accounts. Happy endings and unhappy endings acknowledged this alike.

There is no parting the two strains, moral and political, in the imagination of the nineteenth-century masses. They are hopelessly entangled. Democracy shaped its own entertainments at a time when the vogue of Virtue Triumphant was at its height and they took their pattern from it. This merging is the freak of

human nature we call melodrama, a word at present denoting self-righteous emotionalism that recalls a bygone, exaggerated style of acting. It used to mean a mass of frumpish plays that are still lumped together under this label—a misleading one for *melos* here means nothing since music is not the determining factor. They have been despised because of their very limited variations on Virtue Triumphant as their given theme. They have been dismissed as a mass of deservedly forgotten botchery, relieved by occasional outbursts of deep feeling and scraps of unconscious humour. They have had no champions among aloof critics and few admirers even among playgoers old enough to suffer from sentimental nostalgia.

Professors may be right when they say of such tawdry, badly printed, crudely illustrated stuff, "Not dramatic literature"; elderly actors reasonably join with stage students in deriding the old ways; diligent readers consider the long-winded rhetoric enough to render any work dull. Yet even those who wish to venture solely among masterpieces agree that nothing should be condemned for what it is not. Melodrama must be judged for what it is. Shuffle those dog-eared penny plays and penny dreadfuls long enough and the pattern of a fairly recent but forgotten life takes shape. What is admirable in it, what is honest, sincere, brave, will reveal itself. What is insincere, which is what most people look for in a panorama of old morals, will disclose its excuse.

Here are Virtue Triumphant's attendant errors: confusion between sacred and profane, between worldly and spiritual advancement, between self-interest and self-sacrifice, and other hypocrisies which create a peculiar insensibility to the absurd. All this is known as Victorianism and vulgarly supposed to have been brought about through Queen Victoria's influence. Patience is needed to refute the oft-repeated nonsense. Royal dignity, widowhood and even the worship bestowed upon longevity could not quell in Victoria the enjoyment of life which had been high spirits in her youth; she appointed one actor her Master of Ceremonies and knighted another, even though his life was not one of matrimonial regularity; she smiled upon the self-conferred

peerage of a tenting showman and made both Barnum and Buffalo Bill welcome. In entire forgetfulness of her attempts to oppose Sabbatarianism, a false legend of her arose because attributes from somebody remote are transferred—as Lord Monboddó's theory of “man's descent from monkeys” became fathered upon Darwin—to somebody universally remembered: ancient anecdotes told about modern lives touch up old portraits to serve as new ones. Victorianism owes less to Queen Victoria than to Madame de Maintenon, that paragon of rigid and affluent piety, desperately clutching shreds of outward grandeur to cover the shame of early vagabondage. Sometimes ignorance of French history envisages her as a mere variant of Montespan or Pompadour and thinks of the society her spirit dominated until the Terror as handsomely depraved. To explain how “Victorianism” flourished in Paris until cut down by the guillotine is necessary here because no reference could be made to Carlyle's (or other) volumes in any assurance of finding it mentioned. Those who restrict its reign to the nineteenth century consider that the old order ended in the raffishness and fearless free-thinking of the Regency, but that phase was merely a temporary and unsuccessful revolt. When this exhausted itself, virtue's triumph had but to be effortlessly resumed until there was a universal juvenility of thought. Such typical Victorians as Darwin and Ruskin tried to make popular opinion more adult, but in vain. Even later than the eighteenth-nineties moral melodrama was customary, not only at those theatres where it was unabashed, but also at theatres where it was made to look like the fashionable, the “advanced” and the intellectual combined.

How fast disillusionment set in once the twentieth century began can be understood best by those whose youth was spent in the turmoil. The process was accelerated after the First World War, especially during the nineteen-twenties when it went too fast for some. “Those Barren Leaves”, Aldous Huxley's novel of 1925, marks a stage with “religion, patriotism, the moral order, humanitarianism, social reform—we have all of us, I imagine, dropped all those overboard long ago”. The really cruel, the fundamentally evil, man is as rare as the man of genius or the total

idiot, he says, dismissing whole legions of villains. "There is no reason to be particularly proud of qualities which we inherit from our animal forefathers and share with our household pets. The gratifying thing would be if we could find in contemporary society evidences of peculiarly human virtues . . . a steady, reasonable pursuit of social goods." Virtue became unfashionable. If at one end it swung into hypocrisy, the other extreme was worse. That there was something rotten in the state of the nineteen-twenties medical evidence alone would prove. Among the small community which marked society's outward and passing changes there was heedlessness of respectability and spirituality alike, and in that vitriolic cynicism melodrama at last perished. Nor did it revive except as a freak to be guyed when a new generation put into practice the belief that virtues—no longer called by that corrupted name, but shyly dubbed "decency"—are as natural to man as his digestive organs. Such considerations are for some ponderous history of virtue which must remain among the greatest works never yet written or ever likely to be published. The birth of decency is mentioned here solely because it marks the death of that odd faith in the godliness of worldliness manifest in the career of Madame de Maintenon and multitudinously adopted thereafter. She did not invent the idea. She made it fashionable. At last it dominated almost every mind. Our forebears feared to imagine a state of things where, as Charles Lamb put it, there were no shame and blame, no rewards or punishments.

## ACT I. SCENE I

*Madame de Maintenon sets the fashion*

**B**ECAUSE the Baron d'Aubigné could find nothing worse to do in prison than make love to his wife, the world had to change. That he should have murdered his first wife, led an armed revolt against his indulgent father, betrayed Huguenots and Jesuits in turn, sold French secrets to England and English secrets to France to pay for his debaucheries, and done high treason while viceroy in the West Indies was bad enough. But since he was of distinguished birth all this was tolerable to the nobles related to him by second marriage. What they could not brook was the burden of supporting the children he begat while under arrest at Bordeaux. Rather than face her parents at the third offence his wife asked for transfer to the prison at Niort. There, on November 27, 1635, Françoise d'Aubigné was born in squalor and misery. With her began a new age. It was taking shape in all the vagaries of her girlhood.

Once more d'Aubigné changed his faith, gained his freedom and started life afresh in Martinique. There, a few years later, he died. Madame d'Aubigné returned to France with her children and a load of debts. Françoise, brought up to be a devout Catholic, was left in the charge of her father's sister, who made her a devout Calvinist, upon which her mother's kinswoman, Madame de Neuillant, obtaining control by an order of the Court, wrestled for her soul anew by setting her to tasks in kitchen and cockloft. No signs of grace appeared until an Ursuline convent produced so steadfast a penitent as to rob her of further interest from either Calvinists or Catholics. In this manner Françoise d'Aubigné, girt by triple bands of piety, gained the strength to bend everybody she encountered to serve her in spiritual bondage.

How she first exerted that matchless and indomitable will

becomes apparent when you read her correspondence with the Abbé Scarron, a poet so twisted in body, with his head and shoulders bowed down and his legs bent under him that he resembled (his own idea) a Z. Like some other writers, he had earned the right to wear the useful cassock without taking his vows; it enabled him to join in sartorial thrift the epicurean circle around Marion de Lorme and Ninon de l'Enclos beneath the shadow of the Bastille in Marais. For a youthful frolic he covered himself with honey, ripped open a feather-bed, rolled in it and went straightway to a fair. Frightened women flung water over him with such shameful results that he escaped injury from the mob only by flinging himself over a bridge and hiding under water and rushes. Exposure brought on a fever that turned his knees into a permanent table. Upon them he wrote plays of temporary fame and "Le Roman Comique", a tale of strolling players that endures. Dreams of being restored to health tormented him. News of the recovery of a sick friend in America excited his hopes afresh.

From the country Madame de Neuillant came to Marais in a litter borne by mules with her ward riding one of them. When the Abbé heard of "la belle Indienne" from Martinique he asked to be visited. Though obsessed by his vain dream of recovered health, he saw intelligence in her face as she entered his room. Her dress was too short: she burst into tears. We have heard what an actress of our own day suffered while outgrowing her frocks in a Victorian childhood, a torture to centuries of small girls which ceased directly the world decided to tolerate the female leg; new generations will have to make an effort to understand the agony borne by one such damsel in distress, living betwixt and between luxury and peasantry, on starting adult life in a state of humiliating unseemliness. The grudging gift of a long dress became life's token payment of a debt to be settled in full.

In Marais, reaching womanhood determinedly though prematurely, she profited from lessons in gaiety and art. "She was wise; she would have nothing to do with love", said Ninon de l'Enclos, who had sacrificed so much for its sake that she not unnaturally regarded chastity as calculated and profitable self-

interest. But however prudent Mademoiselle d'Aubigné was in caring for honour, however wise the care of honour might prove to be, this did not solve pressing problems. The crooked little man, now deeply in love with her, proffered a large sum of money. This she refused. What would become of her after Madame's death? She answered with tears that it would be as God willed. He argued that she must become either a nun or his wife. She would not, it is as well to note, be a nun. The bizarre partnership, marriage only in name, suited both. Scarron had no other pleasures than the table. His suppers were livelier still with a hostess, though she curbed free speech. At first his tongue wagged as he pleased. When told that he ought to have an heir, he asked his oafish valet, "Maugiss, would you give my wife a child?" The simpleton answered, "Certainly, sir, if God pleases". Scarron died murmuring, "I would never have believed it so easy to make a mockery of death". For his widow a new career began when the Marquise de Montespan became the king's mistress. As governess to the children born of the royal romance, Madame Scarron's power steadily increased. When the king tired at last, she reconciled him to the queen. When the queen died, Madame de Maintenon became the king's wife.

No conquest of empire was more momentous than her conquest of conscience. Her dominance of *Le Roi Soleil* meant intellectual sway wherever French influence spread. What impress she left on international affairs and religion (notably in the dragging of Huguenots) was recorded; what she achieved through the royal censorship of letters was not, even though she moved the greatest dramatist of the age to write Biblical dramas, untainted by thoughts of love for her convent-school at St. Cyr. Her might manifested itself in the gradual overthrow of that latter-day paganism which delighted in ancient gods, not merely as decorations or *dramatis personæ*. That the king saw himself as another Jupiter was as evident in his desire for miscellaneous progeny as in his order to be deified. Many a noble looked upon himself as an Apollo; the morals of society imitated Olympus with Arlequin, the bawdy jester of the Italian company at the Hôtel de Bourgogne, as their Momus. By compelling the Court to observe



outward piety, by turning the Italians out of their theatre merely for announcing a play called *La Fausse Prude*, by banning books or plays because of imagined affronts to the throne, by banishing courtiers whose writing gave real or imagined offence, Madame de Maintenon made the exercise of adult thought perilous. And by amassing a considerable fortune she remained, both in life and in death, a shining example of how to prosper for righteousness' sake. "Memoirs pour servir à l'Histoire de Madame de Maintenon", in sixteen volumes, was a best-seller to the eve of the Revolution.

In her lifetime and after, the whole nation had to purify its gallantry in the crucible of a wise yet infantile morality. Care for the princes of the royal blood now came first in the thoughts of men of letters. Even obedience to this precept did not ensure safety. Fénelon, chosen for his wisdom and piety to instruct the heir to the throne, was among the disgraced. He had written "*Les Aventures de Télémaque, Fils d'Ulysse*" to provide a model of princely behaviour for his pupil. Through a servant's theft a copy of the MS. was sold to a printer; the story was published and read at Court. Though as simple as a nursery tale it gave offence, for Telemachus uses these words to a king, "Live to correct your faults; restore all you have usurped; re-establish the peace and justice that you have tarnished by so many massacres and betrayals. Love and become another man; learn by your fall that the gods are just, that the wicked are unhappy, that they deceive themselves who seek felicity in violence, inhumanity and deceit; that in the end nothing is so sweet or so gladdening as forthright and constant virtue". The royal anger drove Fénelon into retirement. It was the last blaze of unregeneracy. "*Les Aventures de Télémaque*", eagerly read at its first appearance in 1699 and again when republished after the king's death, helped to usher in the new era.

## ACT I. SCENE II

*Her influence on plays, novels, philosophy*

IN the closing years of the seventeenth century, an English divine, outlawed for freely granting absolution on the scaffold to would-be assassins of William III, sat with a pile of printed plays from London at his elbow and vented on them his scorn. Jeremy Collier's "Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the English Stage" was far from being the first Puritan attack upon the theatre. It is remarkable not so much in itself as in its effect, which would be astounding if you did not recollect how swiftly London then took its cue from Paris. "The Short View" preached to the converted. Courtiers welcomed it. Poets without asking Collier whether bawdry were worse than murder, shamefacedly made little or no defence. Few references to the change were sprightly, like Farquhar's *The Constant Couple* (1700). In the play one character says "We are so reformed that gallantry is taken for vice", to another who responds, "And hypocrisy for religion"; in the epilogue the hero, Wildair, argues:

In vain are musty morals taught in schools,  
 By rigid teachers, and as rigid rules,  
 Where virtue with a frowning aspect stands,  
 And frights the pupil with its rough commands.  
 But woman . . .  
 Charming woman can true converts make,  
 We love the precepts for the teacher's sake;  
 Virtue in them appears so bright, so gay,  
 We hear with transport, and with pride obey.

Other playwrights deliberately chose to be "musty". Wit yielded to moral sentiments in their works; plots and characters existed in order to introduce good words. Audiences, suddenly disgusted with impropriety, now applauded such scenes as the lovers' prayer to Providence "that never sleeps o'er innocence distress'd" in Colley Cibber's *Love Makes A Man*; or, *The Fop's*

*The Fair Penitent*

Lincoln's Inn Fields 1703

*Fortune* where tenderness, humility and tears converted villainy. Instead of ladies of fashion there were modest heroines who sighed, "Nor know I why, but from his mere delight in virtue, that I have been his care", and she who had "no sentiments" was lost. Speeches addressed direct to heaven or recommendations for the increase of saintliness upon earth gave so modish an air to the performance that when a playwright decided to insert into his dialogue only such moralizings as were strictly appropriate, he grew conscious of self-sacrifice. In the prologue to *The Roman Father*, Whitehead boasted of having "stripp'd each luxuriant plume from fancy's wing"—

Nay even such moral, *sentimental* stroke,  
Where not the character but poet spoke,  
He lopp'd, as foreign to his chaste design;  
Nor spar'd an useless, tho' a golden line.

But this came at the tail end of the craze for judging performances less by their merits than by their morals. Other poets had made no such sacrifice of golden, edifying strokes which ensured applause and profit. Read the outstanding plays of the first years of the

eighteenth century; then endeavour to understand the minds of those who made them popular. Smart sets never again affected to be so "good".

'Tis yours with breeding to refine the age  
To chasten wit and moralize the stage

declared the prologue to Steele's *The Conscious Lovers*, which manifested such a determination to contain no objectionable matter that it contained no matter at all.

"Sentimental" comedy about young lovers' strictly honourable intentions, not only towards each other, but towards their parents and future parents-in-law, as well, was one form of polite entertainment. Another was equally sentimental tragedy to point some awful warning. Playgoers delighted in the fate of a dishonest clerk in George Lillo's *The London Merchant; or, The Tragedy Of George Barnwell* which came to a climax with Thorowgood's line, "There see the bitter fruits of passion's detested reign and sensual appetite indulged", in a dungeon. *Jane Shore* preached against lack of chastity. *Oroonoko* showed how natural virtue in a black slave (nobly born, you must note) stayed uncontaminated by civilized vice. Even the darling folly of gaming was corrected—lightly in Garrick's comedy of *The Gamesters*, last version of an ancient jest, and grimly in Edward Moore's tragedy of *The Gamester*, first version of a moral tale often to be acted and re-written in future. *The Grecian Daughter*, five acts of blank verse with a "scene off" where the heroine suckles her starved father, proclaimed that nature triumphed still in wonder-working virtue:

Ye tyrants hear it,  
And learn, that while your cruelty prepares  
Unheard-of torture, virtue can keep pace  
With your worst efforts, and can try new modes  
To bid men grow enamour'd of her charms.

In the background was a religious revival marked by ecstasy and epilepsy that spread, as the eighteenth century advanced, throughout England. All western civilization was acquiring a sense of moral responsibility like a reformed rake bringing up a family. This explains why a timid youth, who liked to be with young persons of the opposite sex and wrote their love-letters for

*The Grecian Daughter*

Drury Lane 1772

them, became through this apprenticeship a novelist of European renown. Fame and fortune were bestowed in 1740 upon Samuel Richardson, the innocent London printer for whom success was marred only by the fear that in portraying Lovelace, the seducer in "Clarissa Harlowe", he had made a libertine too fascinating—a fear that impelled him to portray a model of virtue in "Sir Charles Grandison" who was far from fascinating. Desire to be elevated was all that mattered. Sheer love of virtue caused a widespread desire to shed tears. In Paris fame was won by La Chaussée who invented "le drame ou comédie larmoyante" to facilitate it. His plays, neither tragedies nor comedies, turned distress into happy endings. In *Mélandie* (1741) a mother vainly seeks the father of her child until all are united; in *L'École Des Mères* (1745) a mother who dotes on her son and neglects her daughter is made to see the error of her ways; in *La Gouvernante* (1747) an impoverished countess becomes governess to her own daughter, adopted by a baroness. The new age is very juvenile compared with the adult manner of the old spirit—active for another half-century though almost extinct after 1760—that preferred to see life as it

*The Gamester*

Drury Lane 1753

was instead of as it ought to be. There was a frenzy in England and France to make existence conform to the accepted moral pattern; Nature and morality were one, and evil was caused by interference with Nature. Faith in this idea is plainly behind the Academy of Dijon's historic offer of a prize for an essay concerning whether the arts and sciences were conducive to morality.

Here Jean Jacques Rousseau comes into the story. Virtue had no greater champion since Maintenon. Like her, he had undergone conversions from the Reformed faith to the Catholic faith and back again; like her, he swayed the Court. In all else these two moralists were at extremes, principally because she was virtue's mistress and he its slave. In Geneva, dour city of saints, he was a watchmaker until he set out penniless to rise from domestic servant to civil servant with the right to wear a sword. He wandered from country to country, from woman to woman, from task to task, from belief to belief, until resting one day beneath an oak, he fell into a trance and was vouchsafed the vision which inspired in him a gospel to reform France by making all men virtuous. The first source of evil was inequality; from in-

equality came riches; of riches were born luxury and idleness; from luxury came the arts and from idleness the sciences. Return to nature and all this would be avoided. Every Hottentot kraal was Eden before the Fall. With this doctrine he won the prize offered by Dijon. Though Voltaire wrote, "Reading your works makes one want to go about on all fours," Rousseau lived strictly according to the rules he had drawn up to counteract that "dangerous refinement of manners" which made it possible for men to speak one way and act another. He returned to nature by living with a female simpleton and packing off their children, one by one, to the foundling hospital. Whatever virtue he attained by refusing royal liberality and earning his daily bread by the labour of copying music, brought no peace to his soul. All men, more especially his devoted friends and benefactors, were evil.

In the time of the next generation his "Contrat Social" was destined to become entangled with a fantasy inspired not by the frenzy of virtue but by that hankering after the olden time which it had created. It was a monstrous fairy-tale that borrowed the idea of a haunted castle from French variants of the story of Blue Beard and elaborated it into a tale of mystery and horror. The contrast between its author and Jean Jacques was made, by personal traits, grotesque. While one was sending his offspring to the foundling, the other was cherishing not only his own ancestral ghosts but those of other titled families. While one was objecting to swords, the other was collecting them. While one was homeless, the other made his home world-famous for the fantastic care he bestowed upon it. While one refused the bounty he had deserved, the other was subsidized by the State for no other reason than that his father was Prime Minister. While one insisted on labouring for his daily bread, the other laboured at spending his unearned income. One revived the old world, the other ushered in the new. Though their mental offspring were to mate and propagate, it is difficult to imagine two greater opposites at the turn of the eighteenth century than Jean Jacques Rousseau and Horace Walpole. They were known to one another. Though he personified "the dangerous refinement of manners", Walpole had offered sanctuary to the author of the

"Contrat Social". But when the self-tormentor had repaid the hospitality of his friends in England with resentment, the man of fashion wrote a fictitious letter from the King of Prussia, promising to procure for Rousseau as many new misfortunes as he wished and "to cease to persecute you when you cease to find glory in being persecuted".

Yet Walpole also may have been moved by resentment against the world. There seems to have been a protest against its ever-growing commercialism, the ever-dwindling importance of privilege, in the mock ancestral glories of the country house on Strawberry Hill, overlooking the Thames, which he converted into a "Gothic Villa". There was significance in its battlements and pinnacles of lath and plaster, its entrance under dark arches, its vistas painted in perspective on the wallpaper of hall and staircases, its stained glass and armorial bearings. His satisfaction in imprinting on his private dwelling the gloomth of abbeys and romance of fortresses, recastellated the three kingdoms with battlements enough left over to provide melodrama with its first stock of scenery. No mere antiquary could have so influenced the world. More than a collector's mania directed the steps of that highly gentlemanly figure, "not merely tall, but more properly long and slender to excess", from print-shop to auction room, and made him labour at cheapening—in Macaulay's extravagantly bitter words—fragments of tapestry and handles of old lances, joining bits of painted glass and setting up memorials of departed cats and dogs. His zeal for relics, Queen Mary's comb, Wolsey's red hat, the pipe smoked by Van Tromp during his last sea-fight, and the spur King William stuck into the flank of Sorrel, was one symptom of widespread sentimentality over the past. While professing the fashionable love of liberty and affecting to scoff at rank, title and thrones, Horace Walpole could still write a "Catalogue of Royal and Noble Authors". This was typical of the contradictory spirit of the age which caused debauched dukes to denounce inequality and the noble savage to be sold as a slave—the same contradictory spirit which would still insist that the embodiment of lowly virtue should be highly born. The ever-increasing vogue of "*Cabinets des fées*"—collected editions of



fairy-tales running to the length of encyclopædias—made leisured people inclined to regard life as a fairy-tale. Certainly Horace Walpole tried to conduct life in his pie-crust castle as one.

Although supernatural manifestations could not be bought in the sale-room as easily as old fireplaces and escutcheons, he made up for this by dreaming one night of a gigantic gauntlet descending upon the uppermost banister of a great staircase. As he was “very glad to think of anything rather than politics” (his own words, though they echo his enemies’), he spent two months feverishly writing the romance that was to cause an imaginative epidemic. Since popular novels and popular plays suffered acutely from it for fifty years in all countries, it needs attention. “The Castle of Otranto”, published in 1764 under the pretence of being a translation by William Marshall from the Italian, is haunted by the heaviest ghost—it takes a hundred men to bear his sword—known to fiction. His huge helmet falls from the skies and kills a bridegroom, whose father, Manfred, usurping prince of Otranto, then and there decides to divorce his wife and take the bride, Lady Isabella, for himself. The portrait of his grandfather utters a deep sigh, walks from its panel, beckons Manfred to follow and slams a door in his face. Isabella, flying to the vaults, meets a peasant whom the helmet pushed through the paving—he is Theodore, Otranto’s rightful heir. Three drops of blood fall from the nose of an ancestral statue when there is talk of his marriage to Manfred’s daughter, Matilda, to end the family feud, but she dies and he marries Isabella so as to indulge for ever the melancholy that has “taken possession of his soul”.

While such gloomth became the Byronic plague, the craze for castles persisted so strongly that over a century later retired tradesmen’s country houses had castellated windows, cupboards in the form of cathedral stalls, and pig-sties with fronts borrowed from the façades of ancient chapels. In fiction its influence was apparent in many novels and chap-books that usually bore the word “castle” in their titles. On the stage were many castles. Inside them, other Manfreds tried to force other Isabellas to be their wives while other Theodores struggled against unmerited misfortunes. This plot, most prolific of all things brought by Horace Walpole

## VIRTUE TRIUMPHANT

*Paul And Virginia*

Covent Garden 1800

into fashion, expressed the power over the popular imagination of a feudal decay. That it should fuse with "the Gospel according to Jean Jacques" was inevitable. Lady Isabella's place would be taken by embodiments of virtue who would never cease "to find glory in being persecuted", no matter how hard their ordeals by blood and thunder in all the castles that copied Otranto.

There is yet more to be said for Rousseau as part founder of the new school of fiction. "The Times Literary Supplement" for January 1931 fixes his responsibility on other grounds. It is to the author of "Émile" and "La Nouvelle Héloïse" that we must trace melodrama's fundamental conventions—the division of characters into black-and-white, the faith in Nature's partiality to the good, the identification of virtue with poverty and simplicity, and vice with rank and culture, as well as "the swamping of reason in emotion, the floods of tears, the complete insensibility to the absurd". These affected the writings of Bernardine St. Pierre. After a highly adventurous career as a military engineer he met Rousseau, became his disciple, and in 1788 wrote the idyll of "Paul et Virginie" under his influence. While this was leaving its

mark on the stage in London and Paris, St. Pierre turned botanist in order to show how the hand of Providence reveals itself in all vegetable growth. "What work of science", an English writer asked when his studies were admired by every enlightened part of the world, "displays a more sublime theology, inculcates a purer morality, or breathes a more expensive philanthropy?" Unfettered by system, unawed by authority, St. Pierre looked "immediately into NATURE". What he saw there was "the everlasting course of knowledge and of virtue".

## ACT I. SCENE III

*Moral ardour demands blood*

THROUGHOUT France the cry of "Back to Nature" was raised in woods and wildlands where the starving, leaving fields uncultivated, turned outlaws in company with robbers and cut-throats. While every dilettante sentimentalized over the noble savage, the peasant lived like one under the leadership of Robin Hoods who argued that to plunder was a duty made imperative by the need for a new distribution of wealth. When captured and condemned, they died praising virtue as gladly as the nobles did when ordering them to be butchered.

At Court all revered its name. Indifference might be shown to suffering but never towards moral principles. One rebel at Versailles, a watchmaker (cog-wheels evidently set brains in motion) who married a widow of such social eminence that he had to be ennobled, turned playwright. *Eugenie*, written by Beaumarchais in 1767, received less credit than it deserved for upholding the vogue with a plot to be plagiarized from generation to generation. Persecuted virtue was its theme. Yet an outcry was raised because the devoted girl, lured into a mock marriage by an English lord who deserted her at the call of social ambition, was with child out of wedlock. "These phantoms" is what Beaumarchais called vice and virtue. To the charge of offending

"theatrical decency" he retorted that none of drama's greatest characters had ever been virtuous and argued further that comedy could not cause social unrest because conspiracy, the overthrow of thrones and regicide, were subjects for tragedy. With his tongue thus in his cheek he wrote comedies that did provoke conspiracy, the overthrow of thrones and regicides. Figaro, hero of plays that became the operas, *The Barber Of Seville* and *The Marriage Of Figaro*, ridiculed inequality. The servant was superior to the master in everything except social status. Both plays, banned year after year, gave offence with supposed improprieties concerning sex. Their political opinions gave delight, for Figaro, upholding the sanctity of marriage against the claims of an old Spanish aristocratic custom, personified virtue triumphant.

In Germany "Back to Nature" inspired an intellectual outburst among undergraduates. There was oppression under petty tyrants, sensualists who took heavy toll in rent, taxes, flesh and blood to pay for their elephantine pleasures in palaces named *Sans Souci* or *Mon Repos*, whose classic style indicated that the new spirit had not penetrated here. Fields were not left uncultivated; submissive tenants, rather than turn outlaws, handed over their daughters. The Duke of Württemberg, a "roi soleil" seen through the wrong end of a telescope, was at length converted after a life of debauchery by a miniature Madame de Maintenon. From now onwards he seized his tenants' children, not for hiring soldiers and harlots, but for the sacred cause of education. Among the parents who had to assign to him all rights in their children was a retired army surgeon, overseer of the Duke's gardens. His son, Johann Christoph Friedrich Schiller, was sent at the age of fourteen to the military academy at Ludwigsberg, where he studied law and then medicine. Strict discipline excited in the stronger characters, secret readers of Rousseau, the insurgent spirit of the outside world. At the age of twenty-two Schiller completed the drama of *Die Räuber*, which was published, bearing the device of a lion rampant and the motto, "In Tyrannos". At Mannheim a revised version that put the characters into historical costumes to cloak political motives was staged on January 13, 1782. "If I had been God at the moment before Creation and had then foreseen

that *The Robbers* would be written, I would have left the world unmade", said a German ruler. Undergraduates turned it into a yearly festival. Believing he has no hope of pardon for his 'varsity debts, Karl Moor curses the inequality of the world: "Gold rusts in misers' chests; poverty prevents the bold enterprises of youth". While a crookback brother schemes to steal both his inheritance and his Amelia, Karl cries, "Law and order never yet produced a great man. Freedom alone forms the colossus", and places himself at the head of bandits to found a republic that would make Rome and Sparta seem nunneries by comparison. To save one of his band from execution, he fires a powder magazine that kills old and young and women in childbirth. Old Moor lives in the dungeon beneath a ruined tower before Karl storms the castle where Amelia, discovering her beloved to be a murderer, asks for death. He kills her, remarking, "Many a revolution shall the earth make round the sun ere he beholds a deed to equal mine".

Translate all this into the language, thought and acts of modern life, and you may imagine how, even to the twentieth century, it stirred generation after generation of German youth. Revolutionary Paris gave it a delirious welcome and added Schiller's name to the Republic's list of heroes. In England it was banned for eighteen years until rendered harmless by musical metamorphosis into *The Red Cross Knights*. *Die Räuber* was Walpole's "The Castle of Otranto" lit by the beacon of Rousseau's "Le Contrat Social". To read it now, when the chief "beauty" lies in its awful warning of what untold suffering can occur if fathers do not promptly settle undergraduates' debts, is to marvel afresh at Coleridge's sonnet in its praise:

Schiller! that hour I would have wished to die,  
If through the shuddering midnight I had sent  
From the dark dungeon of the tower time-rent  
That fearful voice, a famished Father's cry—  
Lest in some after moment aught more mean  
Might stamp me mortal!

When the sea withdraws, a storm-rent tower may become a decaying landmark inland. Storms did rend *Die Räuber* while

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Walpole's literary fashion and Rousseau's political passion were breaking over it with the force of tempest at spring-tide. It still indicates how pious ardour became revolutionary fever, how the quest of virtue spread from private conduct to the governing of a country, how the vogue of a juvenile morality became a rage for taking life. Virtue triumphed in blood and thunder.

## ACT II. SCENE I

*Dungeons to express deliverance from evil*

PROPERTY castles became a craze. Paris audiences delighted in them afresh when a device was invented for building them out of wood blocks like a child's box of bricks. After the flares of a mighty conflagration were well alight, stage carpenters would haul at handles on the bottom row of blocks so that the castle would fall each night in retrievable ruins. Thus the vogue may be explained—or explained away, for the overthrow of property castles was allegorical. To see them fall and deliver up their captives satisfied playgoers of the late-eighteenth century. This, the idea of deliverance from evil in its simplest form, was enough. For many years playwrights were under no obligation to discover what the characters or events of the recurring plot signified. That battlements should be overthrown was a spectacle gratifying in itself. There was no need to prepare for so grand a finale by exciting anger against the gaoler and sympathy with his victim. No personal feelings were wanted. The freeing of the captive was not attended by ill-will against merciless oppressors. There was no villain (unless the castle itself could be regarded as such) in command of these perishable and inflammable strongholds. All such dramas were elaborately set to music, usually by the leading composers of the day. The most enduring was *Richard Cœur-de-Lion*, acted in Paris in 1784 (which Sedaine based on a story from the Abbé Millot's "History of the Troubadours") and notable for Blondel's song, *O Richard, O My King, the world has forsaken thee*. Another captive was liberated at the Comédie-Italienne in 1789 when *Raoul Barbe Bleu* (with Sister Anne as the wife's true love disguised in petticoats) ended with a castle taken by assault.

That year, after the Paris mob had carried the Bastille by

assault and liberated its captives, a military banquet was held at Versailles. Louis XVI, accompanied by Marie Antoinette with the Dauphin in her arms, walked round the tables to acknowledge loyal salutes. When the band struck up *O Richard, O My King*, swords were drawn, pledges drunk, white cockades worn and the tricolour trampled under foot. Starving women in the bread lines, hearing of it, marched on Versailles carrying with them the National Guard, Lafayette riding unwillingly at their head, and took the palace by storm. The commander who had opposed Lafayette in America caused that fatal song to be sung in London. General Burgoyne's version of *Richard Cœur-de-Lion* was staged (in rivalry with another version at Covent Garden) at Drury Lane. But a heroine was the singer, not Blondel, the author having decided that the change would "increase the interest of the situation". Rousseau's influence moves Richard, when liberated by the tumbling down of the castle, to declare, "I cherish in the memory of my sufferings here—a lesson to improve my reign—compassion should be a monarch's nature—I have learned what 'tis to need it—the poorest peasant in my land, when misery grieves, in his King shall find a friend".

Dungeons became a mania through a new fashion set in 1791. In *Les Victimes Cloîtrées* a monk keeps a maid he intends to rape imprisoned beneath a convent: it was so full of horrors that tragedies seemed like comedies by comparison. That summer, when Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette had been brought back to the Tuileries after their flight to Varennes, Paris was eagerly reading a captive-in-the-castle romance. Two versions were staged. It is the tale of a Polish traitor who keeps Lodoiska and her lover as his prisoners. They are released by a noble Tartar who storms the castle while villainy perishes in its flames. This time the siege did represent the conflict between virtue and villainy. Lovinski, the hero, is animated, not simply by the desire to liberate Lodoiska and her aged father: he has sacrificed himself in the cause of virtue. Boleslas has not merely thrown the heroine into "une prison affreuse" to force her to respond to his love, but he is a traitor. The popularity of the story suggests that this development was well-timed. The words "bon" and "vertu" were by now the most



overworked in the French language. The Comtesse de Genlis, a pocket Maintenon in theory, marked the progress of the world in her "Annales de la Vertu" through one highly moral act after another, omitting everything else. The oddest play in times so critical that Paris theatres had often to close was inspired by an incident from real life told by Madame de Genlis in "Adele et Théodora; ou, Lettres sur l'Education", published in 1782. In her memoirs she declares the tale to be true. The Duke of Cerifalco had kept his wife nine years in a cave underground, for no reason that could be understood. On his death-bed he gave the key to his servant, with orders to take food to a woman who was, he said, criminally insane. She was recognized and the news sent to her family, who rescued her, prematurely aged and epileptic. On the Paris stage the tale was romanticized with songs, comic relief, and a happy ending. In Marsollier's *Camille; ou, Le Souterrain* (1791) the Duc Alberti, mad through jealousy, gazes at his wife's portrait with emotion while he keeps her imprisoned in the crypt of a ruined castle in the midst of a forest.

English authors increased this dungeon mania. Ann Ward, daughter of respectable London tradespeople, became the wife of William Radcliffe, editor of "The English Chronicle", and wrote a novel, "The Castles of Athlin and Dunbayne". Her style was too wild and unnatural even for Gothic taste. She toured Germany. There she came under the influence of *The Robbers*. In 1794, at the age of thirty, she won resounding success with "The Mysteries of Udolpho", whose hero, Montoni, was a desperado, living in the obscure solitudes of mountain, forest, lake, and ruined castle. Henceforth the word "sensation" referred, not to the operation of the senses, but to the violent emotional excitement of the literary fashion known as "the romantic and the terrible". By these two words the Gothic craze for castles was divided: some had battlements guarded by men-at-arms, the others had ruins haunted by cowed skeletons or bleeding nuns.

## ACT II. SCENE II

“*That lovely maniac, Romance*”

PARIS audiences contained business-like English tourists intent on turning playwrights by becoming the authors of what they saw. The most energetic was a young diplomat, Mathew Gregory Lewis. Among the score of plays he chose to make his own, *Camille; ou, Le Souterrain*, was to his bloodshot fancy, “one of the prettiest and most affecting things I ever saw”. While managers rejected his *Raoul Blue Beard*, other versions made their mark; which was so discouraging that for further inspiration he went to Germany until appointed attaché at The Hague. There, stimulated by Mrs Radcliffe’s “The Mysteries of Udolpho”, he took ten days to write “Ambrosio; or, The Monk” by helping himself to the monk, the maid, and the dungeon from *Les Victimes Cloîtrées*. His novel was welcomed as “shamelessly voluptuous in its pictures of a monk fettered by his religious vows”; and while the Society for the Suppression of Vice called upon the Attorney-General to prosecute, society in general lionized the author on his return. With extra incident from Smollett’s “Count Fathom”, a harmless episode from his book became the ballet of *Raymond And Agnes; or, The Castle Of Lindenberg* at Covent Garden in the spring of 1797. Agnes, confined to a convent, plans to escape disguised as the phantom Bleeding Nun. Raymond, waiting to help her, follows the phantom itself instead, but when Agnes is captured by bandits, he rescues her, whereupon the Bleeding Nun (according to Lewis’s account) ascended to heaven “with great applause in a sort of postchaise made of paste-board”. Drury Lane, ready enough now to accept his plays, staged his *The Castle Spectre* in December 1797. There was a prologue to “that lovely maniac, Romance”. Oft

with glimmering lamp,  
Near graves, new open’d, or midst dungeons damp,  
Drear Forests, ruin’d aisles, and haunted towers,  
Forlorn she roves, and raves away the hours!

Eked out with scraps from his MS. of *Richard Cœur-de-Lion* and a German play on the subject of a certain Landgrave of Thuringia, the plot is as full of thrills as the dialogue is of "Confusion", "Horror" and "Amazement". Earl Osmond, "boiling with passion" for Angela, is unaware that Earl Reginald, his brother and her father, has languished for sixteen years in a dungeon beneath them. The ghost of Evelina, her murdered mother, appears as the organ accompanies a female chorus in "Jubilate". Osmond at last finds the secret dungeon and is about to slay Reginald when Evelina's ghost throws itself between them, so startling the villain that Angela plunges her dagger in his bosom. Towards the end of the season Lewis offered as a wager all the money *The Castle Spectre* had brought to the box-office. "No", said Sheridan, "I cannot afford to bet so much, but I'll bet you all it's worth."

Terror-mongers showered MSS. upon the theatres. In the Rev. T. S. Whalley's *The Castle Of Montval* at Drury Lane in 1799, an old count is kept in a dungeon by a son impatient to enjoy his inheritance. The next year Drury Lane's lavish *Egyptian Festival* gave the captive-in-the-castle fresh territory, while the Royal Circus boasted *The Mine; or, The Black Forest Of Istria* and Astley's Amphitheatre, *The Black Castle; or, The Spirit Of Ravia*. Still the castles grew. Publishers were selling them cheap with lurid frontispieces. One such, "The Castle Spectre; or, Family Horrors", owed nothing to Lewis, but was remarkable, first for a bleeding ghost who rose from a rubbish heap and next for a whole series of assaulted virgins. "Romano Castle; or, The Horrors of the Forest" and "The Black Valley; or, The Castle of Rosenberg" are typical of the sixpenny plague. Readers, as well as playgoers, enjoyed the same tale over and over again under titles that proclaimed their sameness. To be terror-struck inoculated them against fears of Napoleon.

"Monk" Lewis, claiming that all his novels and plays had been written while he was between the ages of fourteen and twenty-one, declared that he had it still in his power "to deluge the town with such an inundation of ghosts and Magicians, as would satisfy the thirst of the most insatiable swallower of wonders". As an earnest of his threat he wrote *Adelmorn, The Outlaw*, which was

staged at Drury Lane in 1801 and must be remembered because it has an innocent hero who believes himself guilty—an idea hailed as newly invented some eighty years later. Both hero and villain regularly fell upon bosoms or sank upon corpses in remorse until a ghost caught fire from his burning dagger. “Of all the last acts that ever were performed on the English stage, I here challenge the Theatre to produce a duller”, was the author’s comment on his own work. Another unpopular contribution was paid to popular drama when he brought *Les Victimes Cloîtrées* to Drury Lane in 1809 as *Venoni; or, The Novice Of St. Mark’s*. Elliston in one cell thumped and battered the party wall to rescue the distressed female in the other at the evident risk of knocking out her brains in the majestic person of Mrs Siddons. Just as “the gentleman was giving his mistress a *striking* proof of his affection” by hurling a lump of mortar at her, the disapprobation became so loud that wall and curtain came down together.

## ACT III. SCENE I

*Ideal of the moral hero challenged*

“THE Drama, justly directed, is the School of Virtue, and Heaven has fixed its seal on the forms, the faces, the minds of these two, its chosen disciples.” That was how a critic spoke of Mrs Siddons and her brother, John Philip Kemble, at the zenith of virtue’s reign over the London stage when Earth’s worst plays were full of Heaven’s best sentiments. “Not wealth but morals make the happy life” is one. The moralizing of English tragedies and French harlequinades is too unctuous to be smiled at. Audiences saw something that we cannot possibly see in Carlin’s domesticated Arlequin and Siddons’ Grecian Daughter. Fashion does what she likes with us. If we had lived in the Age of Virtue we too would have applauded actors who spoke as platitudinarians, because we too should have been (to set your teeth on edge with a coined word in order that you may pay attention to the meaning it conveys) “platitudinees”.

Since fashion must be obeyed, the wisest plan is to take advantage of fashion. How this can be done was shown by Henry Mackenzie, Crown agent in Edinburgh. In actuality he was, so Sir Walter Scott said, “as alert as a contracting tailor’s needle in any sort of business”; in print he had a sigh ready for every sentiment. Consequently his novel, “The Man of Feeling”, published anonymously in 1771, was a literary triumph. Its hero tells the young woman he has always loved that he is prepared for death. She replies that life has its proper value: “As the province of virtue, life is ennobled; as such, it is to be desired—To virtue has the Supreme Dictator of all things assigned rewards enough even here to fix its attachment”. He lifts his eyes from the ground. “There are”, he says, in a very low voice, “there are attachments, Miss Walton.” They both betray a confusion. “To love”, he adds,

"could not be a crime. If to declare it is one—the expiation will be made." He seizes her hand—"a languid colour reddened his cheek—a smile brightened faintly in his eye. As he gazed on her, it grew dim, it fixed, it closed. He sighed and fell back on his seat. Miss Walton screamed at the sight—His aunt and servants rushed into the room. They found them lying motionless together—His physician happened to call at that instant. Every art was tried to recover them—with Miss Walton they succeeded, but Harley was gone for ever!"

Since flutterings of heart and handkerchief were affected by all who aspired to be men of taste and fashion, the shrewd Scot's ideas are not mere entertainment. They were the mould of form to those who wore their moral feelings upon the cumbersome sleeves of knee-length jackets. Their fads were adopted by all manner of men from the young Irish clergyman who transcribed the whole of "The Man of Feeling" with blottings, interlineations and corrections, created a general belief that he was the author and drowned himself on being repudiated by the printer; from hysterical types such as this to the monumental Dr Johnson who greatly admired Richardson, saying, "You must read him for the sentiment, and consider the story as only giving occasion to the sentiment". Sheridan knew how outraged such feelings would be by *The School For Scandal* at Drury Lane. That offence was taken is evident in the way Cumberland nagged his children in the stage box, "You should not laugh, my angels, there is nothing to laugh at", which drew from Sheridan the retort, "Devilish ungrateful that, for I sat out his tragedy last week, and laughed from beginning to end"—Cumberland's tragedies were nothing if not moral. All pretenders to virtue *à la mode* were mocked when Joseph Surface declared that Snake could not be suspected because he was a man of sensibility, when Sir Peter growled, "Oh, damn your sentiments", and when "Moral to the last" became a tag to fit hypocrisy. With *The School For Scandal* began a temporary and limited revolt against virtue triumphant. Thirty years earlier Dr Hoadley, Royal Physician, had overcome the prejudice against rakes by presenting Ranger, hero of *The Suspicious Husband*, as one so perfectly blameless that the audience's murmurs died down.

*The Mountaineers*

Haymarket 1793

It is not then so much the glamour of Charles Surface as the disfavour of Joseph that created the popularity of Corinthian Toms; the exposure of self-advertised righteousness made the public prefer those who advertised their sins to those who advertised their sensibility. Not that the revolt spread very far: it did not prevent George Colman the Younger from bringing the principles of Joseph Surface to bear on his task as Licensor of Plays by scoring out all dialogue so profane as to mention God, heaven, or angels. As playwright under another name he could write comedies with doubtful jokes; he could also write in the style of Joseph Surface's "For the man who attempts to —". The part he wrote for Kemble in *The Mountaineers* abounds in speeches in the man-of-feeling strain:

Ruffian, hold!

Advance thine arm the tithe part of a hair  
To injure helpless woman, by my soul . . .

He who would cut the love that does entwine  
And link two loving hearts in unison,  
May have man's form; but . . .

*The Iron Chest*

Drury Lane 1796

Thus "He who" was fossilized. The modish sentiment, a passing fad in the living world of Mackenzie, survived as a form of speech natural in the heroic and virtuous. Its absence from the tales of mystery and terror deprives Monk Lewis of the claim, often thrust upon him, to be the founder of melodrama. Henceforward the virtuous and the heroic had always to echo the phraseology of Joseph Surface. There was no withstanding virtue's triumph yet. John Philip Kemble was still great because he personified it. In any other kind of rôle he was not wanted. He did appear as Charles Surface and was earnestly begged not to repeat the offence. He went farther, and in Colman's *The Iron Chest* tried to look like guilty conscience. Of course he failed, though the quarrelsome author, in a venomous preface to the published text, accused him of every crime an actor could commit except faulty judgment. "His emotions and passions were so rare, and so feeble", Colman complains, "that they season'd his general insipidity, like a single grain of wretched pepper thrown into the largest dose of water gruel that was ever administer'd to an invalid."

The play was based on William Godwin's novel, "Things As They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams", which was dramatized for the Paris stage in 1799 under the title of *Falkland*. In the original story Falkland commits murder for which others



are hanged. By means of a life of good deeds he seeks to justify a code of honour peculiar to himself. Though overwhelmed by wretchedness, which deepens as he tries to surround himself with inscrutable mystery, he is not a repentant sinner. Directly he suspects that his secret is known to Caleb Williams, his secretary, he persecutes the youth in order to make sure and then tries to have him killed. The originality of the portrait had a startling force. How it fascinated can be judged by the singular determination noticeable in figures of a later date, to be guilt-laden at all costs; and how powerfully it made itself felt can still be sensed even in Colman's mis-telling of the story with changes of names. Sir Edward Mortimer keeps his written confession in an iron chest with the key left in the lock; while trying to fix the guilt on Wilford he directs the arm of the law to it, cries, "Where is my honour now?" and dies. Silly though that is, it cannot subdue the mental torment. The philanthropist who cries, "Let my pure flame of honour shine in story, when I am cold in death", can yet threaten Wilford that a naked felon,

Left on the heath, to blister in the sun,  
Till lingering death shall end his agony,  
Compared to thee, shall seem more enviable  
Than cherub to the damn'd.

Virtue's concept of a world divided into blacks and whites was being challenged. Godwin overthrew the belief that the man of honour could do no wrong. In his private life he upheld the belief that a woman without conventional honour could do right. When a child was about to be born he married Mary Wollstonecraft, practitioner of what came to be known as free-love, whose "Vindication of the Rights of Woman" (1792) plays its part in this history. Their daughter has her place too as the author of "Frankenstein".

## ACT III. SCENE II

*Rights of woman vindicated more or less*

TREMORS of the social earthquake in France were shaking every mind. What had been hailed as a struggle for freedom was changing into a threat of tyranny. Faith in the temporal power of virtue was shaken. Even without such evidence that it could not tie the world to its apron-strings, there was a feeling that its sentiments had had their day. They were beginning to nauseate even before it was realized that Arcadias where kings cherished their rustic people bore no resemblance whatever to England where, under a mad King and a rakish Regent, the seizure of common lands seemed to be driving country labourers to beg in the stinking towns. These were the hard facts of life; they did not need thinking about; they were no mere subjects for debate by the studious; they thrust themselves under every nose; they were not, since this was a time of national peril, much talked about. But how deeply they were felt is plain in unconscious expressions of taste. Although idealism did not go out, some less exalted notions did come in. That bizarre chapter of history, when destiny mocked Rousseau's doctrine by setting imbeciles on thrones, expressed itself in the works of a German playwright, acted everywhere, in barns as well as theatres, by sans-culottes in Paris as well as by the Kembles in London. Uneasy murmurs under this applause swore that these dramas tampered with morality. Still angrier voices railed against the author, as he passed from court to court, for accepting bribes. While acquitting him of both immorality and corruption, the modern mind sees him as the embodiment of compromise, though he was but giving shape to what was already in the thoughts of his fellow men.

August Friedrich Ferdinand von Kotzebue wrote ninety-eight plays, among them several which were acted in all the leading theatres of the world. He was an attorney of Jena in 1780;

next, at St. Petersburg, director of a German theatre. He married well, caught the eye of the Empress Catherine and rose in her esteem until, on the death of his wife, he left the country. In Vienna he won fame and fortune afresh, returned to Russia and was there arrested as a spy. One of his plays, flattering to the Tsar Paul, fell into the right hands and Kotzebue again directed St. Petersburg's German theatre. When the Tsar engaged him to inquire into the state of literature and public opinion in Germany, liberal thinkers denounced him as a spy and traitor to liberty. At Mannheim, on March 23, 1819, a student stabbed him to death. There was a scene recalling the account in *The Robbers* of preparations at the gallows. The people who had applauded Schiller's heroes now wished Karl Moor's rescue. Troops of all arms were mustered in strength to hold the crowds back, and drums were beaten so that nobody should hear the student's last words.

While that doom was still unforeseen, Kotzebue was giving melodramatic shape to the idea of spiritual balance. Much was to be made of this in the future. With him it never went beyond simple regeneration—women who had sinned and were sorry for it—with but little hint of atonement, expiation or reparation. The affinity with Godwin's novel is more apparent than real, for Falkland is tormented not by any sense of guilt but by fear of being found out and having his own code of honour broken upon the hard judgment of the law. There is no "tampering with morality", no spirit of compromise, in *The Iron Chest*; the spiritual balance is effected by retribution; it is a tragedy. Kotzebue, on the contrary, bestowed happy endings upon plots that merited disaster according to his contemporaries, and even bestowed bliss upon heroines who were, however virtuous at heart, unchaste. This type occurs in the three dramas that made his name known abroad. In *Misanthropy And Repentance*, incessantly played in England and America as *The Stranger*, a heartbroken recluse at last forgives the wife whose infidelity wrecked his life. This was how the story was told even when acted by the Kembles. A Mr. Schenk who "improved upon the original" had his MS. rejected. He made the wife stop short of the full measure of guilt. In her confession she states, "I am that wretch who eloped and although I returned and

saw my error, just before the purpose of my deceiver was accomplished, yet even the elopement from so kind a husband is a most frightful crime”.

The other two dramas were inspired by “*Les Incas*”, written by Marmontel in 1777 to point a moral against fanatical bigotry. Little of this survived in the incidents dramatized by Kotzebue. Cora, heroine of *A Virgin Of The Sun*, is a vestal who betrays her vows; Elvira, heroine of *Pizarro*, its sequel, is the great captain’s mistress. Kotzebue was vindicating the rights of woman. It would not do for Paris. *Pizarro* at the Opéra in 1785 was sentimental with unadulterated virtue triumphing over every heart, the Spaniard’s included. Sheridan’s *Pizarro*, staged amid scenic splendours in 1799 and periodically revived in London during the next sixty years, so improved on the original that it was promptly translated into German. At Drury Lane Kemble’s warlike virtue made Pitt exclaim, “There is the noblest actor I ever saw”, and Mrs Siddons did not deign to throw herself heart and soul into the part of Elvira, “a soldier’s trull”. While a dreadful storm rages, Cora sings to her baby in the forest. Spaniards carry it to Pizarro’s camp, where Rolla bears it across a cataract back to the Peruvians. Sheridan made Rolla say, “They, by a strange frenzy driven, fight for power, for plunder and extended rule—WE, for our country, our altars and our homes—THEY follow an Adventurer whom they fear—and obey a power which they hate—WE serve a Monarch whom we love—a God whom we adore”—regarded ever since as clap-trap in times of peace and as oratory in times of war. Among Kotzebue’s other dramas was *La Perouse*, a pretty story that made light of the French Navigator’s unknown end (for this was before Captain Dillon found evidence of his shipwreck in Vanikero, one of the Santa Cruz Islands). The play had two unacted English versions in 1799; two years later *Perouse; or, The Desolate Island* was played at Covent Garden as a pantomime by John Fawcett. *La Perouse*, escaping from the wreck, builds a hut assisted by a little savage called Chimpanzee, and this piece was often revived as a ballet. Otto von Kotzebue, the playwright’s brother, was a celebrated navigator, whose name, like that of Perouse, is on the map.

## ACT IV. SCENE I

*Fall of the Bastille off the stage and on*

SILKEN shepherds and shepherdesses, posturing in costly Arcadias, expressed their artless love of virtue in elegant affectations. These were amateurs of the eighteenth century's world of fashion. Very far down the social scale ragged mummers trudged their way from town to town with a cart-load of classical swords, shields, pillars and cornices belonging to unregenerate tragedies, deficient in the new moral sense. Strolling players in Scarron's "Le Roman Comique" travel over miry roads where their wagon, laden with scenery, overturns into ditches, and then have to struggle on arrival at their journey's end for the right to perform. They had no such right. In France, as in England, players without royal or noble patronage were rogues and vagabonds. Yet they persisted until as law-breakers they were law-makers. Staid history has never done them justice: these make-believe poisoners, assassins, suicides, murderers and slaughterers battled more stubbornly for democratic virtue than men who shed real blood. Even Arlequin was fighting for freedom while mocking the good fairy who was converting the world: and chastened Arlequins, taught to be more respectful towards virtue's representative, still opposed the law. They invented the dodge of the écriteaux, scrolls for people to read the dialogue that actors were forbidden to speak. These were lettered audiences though the theatres were at the fairs. The greater public not only could not read but demanded from any play that people should be able to follow the story without having to understand the words. (No authority need be sought for this: it still is so in humble "flicks".)

For such a very sound and sufficient reason the popularity of dumbshow had always existed. From the time of England's Merry Monarch and France's pious mistress, strolling players

were forced to give the masses what they wanted. There had to be a new kind of acting that was akin to acrobatics, juggling, animals' antics and trick-riding. Nor was it enjoyed by the simpletons alone, for tippling gentlemen from town came where they could be noisy without being molested by the law-abiding. Profits accrued. Instead of being confined to booths at fairs, the people's entertainments needed permanent quarters. Paris had its Ambigu Comique and London its Sadler's Wells, which were so alike in character that one imported spectacles from the other. Acting at Theatres Royal was affected. Fine speaking was no longer the all in all. By-play became important. Covent Garden and Drury Lane had secondary companies, recruited from the musick-houses, to play wordless after-pieces. The Théâtre Français sometimes favoured a style of performance which was half one and half the other, the credit for inventing which belongs to Rousseau. His *Pygmalion*, played at court and later at the Théâtre Français in 1775, is a brief sketch—mainly the sculptor's soliloquy as he amorously deliberates whether to disrobe Galatea with his chisel, while music, between each of his utterances, expresses the state of his mind. About the same time Georg Benda brought out at Gotha a version of *Ariadne Auf Naxos* in monologue form that gave spoken words musical accompaniment. The French device was called *mélodrame*, the German melodrama (and on the Continent these contradictory meanings persist). Beaumarchais, in an outburst against the decline of song, wrote, "We shall have, instead of opéras, *mélodrames*". The operas were those castle-burning spectacles, interspersed with ballads, and the *mélodrames* those dungeon dramas which "painted the scene" with music.

What did mere technical tricks matter? It was not at first apparent, for during the Revolution players acted where they willed and their performances were too frenzied to be hindered by music. Paris celebrated the first great victory of democracy with *La Prise De La Bastille; ou, La Liberté Conquise, pièce nationale in quatre actes* by David, which was immediately transported to London in triplicate. One version, rehearsed at Covent Garden, was banned and the scenery adapted for *The Crusaders*. The second



*Mr Palmer as Ahasuerus in The Triumph Of The Jewish Queen*

belongs to the history of the circus, whose birth in these times was another symptom of democracy since the showmen were riding-masters seeking employment from the public now the nobility were too poor to pay them. The third, though given in a building known as the Royal Circus, was drama through and through. *The Fall Of The Bastille; or, The Triumph Of Liberty* was acted in direct defiance of the law. What had been opened originally as the British Riding School had obtained a musick-house licence when rebuilt. The management, on the showman's time-honoured principle of making new laws by breaking old ones,

## DRAMA OF DEMOCRACY

had enlarged his right to present songs, dances, and displays of agility into musical spectacles of every kind. But *The Fall Of The Bastille* made no pretence whatever of being musical. What was worse in the eyes of those who invoked the law, it pleased the public mightily. All seats were taken; all places in the arena, generally used for horsemanship, filled. George Colman paid 3s. 6d. for a form on which he and his lady might stand. His visit was ominous. As licensee of the Haymarket, he would resent this attack on the dramatic monopoly and had only to inform the patentees of Drury Lane and Covent Garden of the Royal Circus's success for them to put an end to it.

Since he had dared to speak prose upon the stage of a house licensed only for music and dancing, John Palmer, the leading actor, was arrested, convicted as a rogue and vagabond, and sent to Bridewell. But the piece had not been called *The Triumph Of Liberty* for nothing. It went on with a new hero who was "an Adonis among the ladies". Cheers again rang out. Another warrant was issued and another champion of liberty taken to Bridewell. The stage-manager, who was a sound actor and a firm, bold declaimer, filled the gap, but he was no Adonis. A new piece, *The Champs De Mars*, succeeded until affected by a difference in the daily news: Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were now the captives who commanded sympathy.

## ACT IV. SCENE II

### *Democracy expresses itself in Figaro and Jolly Jack Tar*

BEFORE melodrama came into being its general purpose and design were thus becoming apparent. Elsewhere than in performances of similar tendency, characters who were to be among the glories of melodrama were already popular. Democratic virtue was in demand. The effect of this in France



may be seen in the complaint made at a later time against *Alexis Et Justin* (1785), that stage peasants spoke in too elevated a style: while virtuous sentiments were proper to all, "un homme commun" did not in real life express himself like a man of quality.

Applause awaited any character ready to sacrifice himself for his country and to uphold all that was good. What hero could embody this ideal? The noble savage sanctified by Rousseau's idea of a return to nature remained in favour without satisfying anybody. What type could be universally acceptable? In Paris Arlequin still wore the black-cat mask, still dressed in a lozenge-patterned suit and still carried the bat. But instead of clowning in impudent burlesques with a leaning towards bawdry, he now demonstrated domestic dutifulness in insipid comedies that aimed solely at exhibiting him as a devoted husband and doting father. Had not Jean Jacques said that a king was the indulgent parent of his people, and was not the home life of Louis XVI above reproach? It was the last gasp of a royalist sentiment which sought to affirm that a monarch who was a faithful spouse and a fond parent must therefore be democracy's ideal on the throne—the last gasp in France, to be heard a century later in England at a time when another Beaumarchais would be writing other prefaces about "these phantoms".

What other type would serve the purposes of the stage? Too many sins were on Karl Moor's head, and exemplary outlaws were meaningless. "Have you been reading the old ballad of Robin Hood?" Karl contemptuously asked a would-be recruit to his band of robbers; and Schiller might have put the question to English playwrights who thought the hero of Sherwood Forest would do for the age of Rousseau. In one such comic opera brought out at Covent Garden in 1784, Robin Hood spends three acts merely awaiting his pardon and deserving it with such sentiments as, "There does not exist a greater wretch than he, who, by persuasion and perjury, seduce to shame the object of his passion". John Bannister, the Robin Hood of 1784, drew another portrait of virtue that was to become historic when he played Walter in *The Children In The Wood* at the Haymarket in 1793. In the gloomy forest chosen for the crime, Walter appeals to his part-

*The Purse; or, The Benevolent Tar*

ner's better nature (though the ruffian has none) and in a faltering voice asks him to save the poor innocents. There is a fight. Walter, the victor, exclaims, "I did not think I had so much pluck in me".

For Englishmen, one character now personified virtue triumphant above all others. The Jolly Jack Tar regularly sang his sea songs at musick-houses around London, and brought on a "property" boat that somehow expressed, as he did, the love of freedom. History is made by characters of fiction as well as of fact, and by characters that are neither wholly the one nor wholly the other. Arlequin may seem a fancy, but he was a series of real live actors each with a decided personality. Figaro is Beaumarchais speaking. The Jolly Jack Tar is unlike either. He existed in thousands. Look for him among the sailors in Elizabethan or Restoration plays and you will rarely find him—not in *The Tempest* certainly. It was when real sailors were singing from tavern to tavern in port that singers imitated them, as can be seen in the sea-faring ballads which were published long before Thomas stepped from a boat on to the stage of Covent Garden in 1760. The piece was *Thomas And Sally; or, The Sailor's Return* by Isaac Bickerstaffe, formerly of the Marines, with music by Arne. After singing

about Honest Jack, with a home in every land and a wife in every port, Thomas rescues his Sally when the Squire is about to offer her violence.

Thenceforth his was the face that launched not only a thousand ships but songs and stories beyond number. His character may not be judged by his stage appearances alone. Chap-books with enthusiastic reports of his amorous exploits, testify that virtue did not make him chaste. That was not demanded from the defender of his country's honour—not yet. What he always upheld was Robin Hood's principle of protecting the weak against the strong. No author could claim the credit for him. In fiction as in fact he was the natural product of the time when his island was universally acclaimed the home of freedom—another word for virtue. Seafarers had ceased to be pirates as soldiers had ceased to be pillagers. They had a moral principle to fight for. The Jolly Jack Tar was the English equivalent of Figaro, born of the freewill of a people. In the same years that Beaumarchais created his famous valet, Charles Dibdin devoted his gift of melody and training as a character-actor to the service of the sea. When the young musician first entered Covent Garden's stage-door, audiences expected to celebrate naval victories as a regular part of public entertainment. As Pocock, Boscawen, Hawke, and Keppel sent their foes to the bottom a grateful public bestowed its favours upon the representative of their crews, some manly figure who came before the footlights in the guise of the Jolly Jack Tar.

The Peace of Paris coincided with the start of Dibdin's stage life. According to his own story it was during a rough Channel crossing that he dedicated his gifts to those in peril on the sea. That he be blowed for a yarn. Like every composer of light music he merely obeyed the trident wielded by Father Neptune in the manner of a conductor's baton. These were the years of the Saucy Arethusa, of Rodney, of Howe, of the Glorious First of June. Even without an appreciative Government to award him a pension Dibdin could not but obey the clamour for songs of the sea. His were the best, but even without them a stirring collection could be made of ballads now irreverently dubbed the "O-come-all-ye's". Between Nelson's touch and the pianist's touch the in-

*The Bluejackets*

fluence was direct. Admirals supplied inspiration and composers the songs. On Dibdin's prolonged passage home from Calais after a pleasure trip, "Reflections that I was on my return to her who has since lent inspiration to so many similar sentiments" prompted a song about a ship. Because he was then engaged as a theatrical composer, he intended the next to be sung in character. In his musical dialogue, *England Against Italy*, at Sadler's Wells, in 1773, he wrote:

Your finicking sirs may in finery appear  
Disdaining such tars as can haul, reef and steer,

as a grace-note to those nautical strains which swelled into full blast when the Haymarket that year celebrated the King's trip to Portsmouth:

Mistake me not, my hearts of oak,  
I scorn with Liberty to joke,  
Ye sov'reigns of the sea.

More was demanded, and in *Yo, Yea; or, The Friendly Tars*, another musical dialogue for Sadler's Wells in 1777, and *True Blue; or, The Press Gang* at the Haymarket in 1781, he told how "Jack with smiles each danger meets" and praised "the kind honest heart of a Tar".

In the early years of Nelson's glory, pride in the Navy inspired a little piece at London theatres called *The Purse; or, The Benevolent Tar* by J. C. Cross. It follows Gothic fashion with "Distraction" and "Amazement" in the dialogue, with its conscious-tortured villain named Theodore and with a castle in the wood as its scene. Will Steady brings the baron's long-lost son "safe into the harbour of happiness" with salt-spray dialogue, full of "avasts". A villain he unmasks says, "Gaming, the seducing origin of various crimes, instigated me to appropriate vast sums, your property, to a use has brought destruction on me". Another modest little piece, staged at Drury Lane in 1795, was by Samuel Birch, who, when deputy to the City Corporation for the ward of Cornhill, originated the idea of Volunteers, and served as Lieutenant-Colonel Commandant of the First Loyal London Regiment. Such championship of liberty is what you would expect from the author of his musical drama in two acts, *The Adopted Child*. Michael, who launches the little boat of freedom to save the rightful heir to the castle, defeats the usurper with a good cudgel, "all the weapon an honest cause wants, and more than a bad one will encounter".

## ACT IV. SCENE III

*Performances in Paris under the Terror*

ON January 19, 1791, the National Assembly gave every Frenchman the right to own a theatre. Among those built in the next few months was the Théâtre Marais where Schiller's undergraduate drama was transformed by le citoyen La Martelière into *Robert Chef De Brigands* with "guerre aux châteaux, paix aux chaumières" as its battle-cry. When news was brought that the wicked count had been stabbed to death, his vassals were reported to have stood idly by because the death of a tyrant was a boon to his subjects. How closely the democratic

ideal identified itself with the moral ideal was clear in one scrap of dialogue:

But his courtiers?—Courtiers are cowards.

But his friends, his friends?—The wicked have no friends.

In the sequel to this drama, *Le Tribunal Redoutable*, the captive in the castle was an aristocrat. Sans-culottes of the faubourg Saint-Antoine compelled the piece to be withdrawn. Suffering virtue could not be allowed coat-armour.

Another of the new theatres, the Molière in the rue Saint-Martin, was soon renamed the Sans-Culottes because of the abundance of its blood and thunder. *Les Crimes De La Féodalité*, by la citoyenne Villeneuve, exhibited the rage of the Duc de Forsac against his daughter and the vassal she had secretly married; the peasants stormed the castle, freed the lovers and killed the tyrant. This was acted at several theatres and proved to be the most popular play of the Terror, though drama was not always required to be plain-spoken. Loaisel de Treogate, who had worn the scarlet uniform of the gendarmes du Roi, turned playwright at the Théâtre des Sans-Culottes without committing himself politically, for there in 1792 his *Le Château Du Diable* contented itself with a knight-errant's adventures to befriend terrified peasants in a haunted castle. Whatever changed in the world outside, the theatres stuck to captives in castles and brigands in forests. Again in 1797, at another of the new theatres, Loaisel de Treogate brought out *La Forêt Perilleuse; ou, Les Brigands De La Calabre*. Colisan, searching for the brigands who have abducted his beloved Camille, sees them pass into their cave where a rock turns on a pivot. He follows, only to be captured and condemned to death, but the executioner kills his captain instead, saying to the lovers, "You owe me nothing. I have done my duty. I have avenged society". As music interlarded the dialogue this must be acclaimed as the first true melodrama. It was acted, in its English form of *The Brigands Of Calabria*, for seventy years or more.

## ACT IV. SCENE IV

*Blood-and-thunder dumbshow on the Surreyside*

IN this moment when the curtain is about to rise on the original and authentic mélodrame with its Gothic gloom in a tremendous glow of sunset, another claim has to be considered first. Before its birth on the Boulevard du Temple a kind of performance uncommonly like it was already customary in the equivalent quarter of London. At the Royal Circus the pièce de résistance of every programme, mixed with dancing, singing, and horsemanship, was a "serious pantomime" of blood and thunder.

"Come with me", wrote a critic when recalling these delights in later days, "for a walk from Pall Mall to St. George's Fields (literally fields then), pass the Haymarket with me—the Haymarket of waggons, with their sweet-scented loadings and white-smocked countrymen and everything redolent of summer time and summer season. We reach the bridge that spans the river at Westminster; we cross it, and meet high-banked pathways on each side of the road, blocks of small houses (I had almost said sheds) with fields and gardens filling the space between, and here and there on the roadside bright running water. Some short distance from the bridge we reach a toll-gate, flanked by a rough-built tavern of wood, with projecting bay-windows, looking down the famed New-cut (not the New-cut of now, but a tree-teeming, grass-growing spot of landscape that, in the present time, you might look for miles and miles away). We'll go on. More fields, more gardens, and another toll-gate, and we come upon a white-faced building with a green trellis frontage, and on its roof the figure of a rearing horse with wings—the Royal Circus (now the Surrey Theatre); we'll enter the centre door beneath the trellis, go up a small flight of stairs, and look upon a half-darkened theatre, with a large sawdust-covered ring in its centre. Pause; the place grows lighter, a thick smoke ascends from a cut in the centre of a green baize curtain; a row of oil lamps

arise, and we clearly see a place of public entertainment crammed to the ceiling; a ballet dance is danced by gentlemen in short jackets and white small clothes, assisted by ladies in red skirts and green garlands; this is followed by a drama of serious pantomimic character, aided, where the story grew dark, by written scrolls held up to the audience. For instance, 'I am thy father', 'Behold thy mother', 'Your sister is dumb', 'Your brother is an idiot', with a spirited sprinkling of attempted murder, broadsword fighting, and masked music, and a wind-up of many persons on the stage, and a brilliant tableau, where the oppressed were relieved from oppression, and the oppressor dealt by with true theatrical justice."

These dumb dramas were the work of James C. Cross. As an actor at Covent Garden he brought out in 1790 a piece called *The Divertissement*, which introduced some of Dibdin's favourite songs. What determined Cross's fate was the early death of his wife. By his second marriage he became acting-manager and part-proprietor of the Royal Circus. There is something of a midge-on-the-brow-of-Shakespeare about this unobtrusive poet-manager who made plays for a theatre, not so far from Bankside, out of any romantic plot already approved. But of all his borrowings none deserves more attention than the Jolly Jack Tar he took from Dibdin. In "Parnassian Bagatelles", a collection of popular songs, occasional addresses, prologues and dramatic trifles which Cross published in 1796, Ben Bowling, Jack Rattling, and faithful Poll keep reappearing with the shipwrecked cabin boy and the one-legged sailor as variants. Even in a piece with the loblolly title of *The Village Doctor* (played at the Royal Circus on Easter Monday, 1796), the stage directions read, "Enter Sailors and Jack Rattling from a boat".

At the Royal Circus on Easter Monday, 1798, and for upwards of a hundred nights, Cross's *Blackbeard; or, The Captive Princess* was presented in rivalry with Drury Lane's *Blue Beard*. While the jolly pirate's crew are cannonading a vessel bearing Mogul colours, Nancy, disguised as one of them, expounds the plot in song. There is nothing Gothic about Nancy, nothing of the helpless captive or even of a pathetic Cinderella. She was not a com-



pletely new character in fiction for the heroine of *The Fair Maid Of The West; or, A Girl Worth Gold*, Heywood's double comedy of 1631, went to sea as a sailor, and drolls (potted versions) of this piece were acted in booths at Bartholomew Fair in Cross's lifetime. Even so, Nancy's appearance in an age devoted to damsels in distress is a very pleasant surprise:

In jacket blue, and trousers neat,  
 Snow-white that play'd around my knee,  
 I join'd the ship in Willy's fleet,  
 Most dear to Anne, and cross'd the Sea.  
 A storm came on—rude tempests blew—  
 A Pirate's flag appall'd each heart!  
 We struck—they forc'd him join their crew,  
 I still from Willy scorned to part.

Ismene, a Mogul princess, is captured, and is going to precipitate herself into the sea, when a negro enters bearing one of the following scrolls. Blackbeard reads it and quails but, after the audience has cheered it, displays the other.

THE ENEMY IS BRITISH  
 AND WILL  
 DIE OR CONQUER

SHOULD THE ENEMY  
 PROVE VICTORIOUS  
 BLOW UP THE SHIP

Scene XIII, and last, showed Blackbeard's ship and the British ship grappled together in close action, which gave such lasting satisfaction that the piece was provided with dialogue and became part of nineteenth-century theatrical stock. *Sir Francis Drake And Iron Arm*, which opened at the Royal Circus in the August of 1800, was more ambitious. Ten changes of scene show the bandit's cave by a "wild bridge over a waterfall", views of streets, the quay, harbour and fortifications in Carthage, a ruined monastery, and finally an engagement between the Spanish and English Fleets. "Boats are seen rowing from ship to ship—Sir Francis giving orders, from his quarter deck, through his speaking trumpet—Iron Arm, on board of one of the boats, attacks

Alphonso on board another—boards him—overburthened with numbers it sinks, and Alphonso and Iron Arm swim for their lives, the former to another boat, the latter till he reaches the head of a large ship near the front of the stage—attempts to board it, commanding his men to follow him—the Castle takes fire, and the whole town of Carthagera appears in ruins.” Dumb dramas were staged by Cross at the Royal Circus until it was burned down in 1805; he continued in the new building with *The False Friend*; or, *The Assassin Of The Rocks*, in which Will, the bos’un, and Alice, his sweetheart, mix with bandits in “a most extensive chasm” and with a melancholy Gothic villain in a cavern.

Before the subject of Jack Tars’ sweethearts is left behind, something must be said of an old ballad called, *Caroline And Her Young Sailor Bold*:

It is of a nobleman’s daughter  
So comely, so handsome, we hear,  
Her father possessed a great fortune  
Full thirty thousand a year.  
And he had but one only daughter,  
Caroline was her name, I am told;  
And one day from her drawing-room window  
She ad-mi-red a young sailor bold.  
Tiddy dol, tiddy dol, tiddy li-do;  
Tiddy dol, tiddy dol, tiddy day.

She disguises herself as a Jack Tar. “Four years and a half on the salt seas” she sails with her young sailor bold:

Her duty she done like a sailor,  
Sent aloft in her jacket so blue ;

and not until the seventh verse do the lovers land to enjoy a happy and cheerful ending on two hundred thousand in gold.

## ACT V. SCENE I

*Gilbert de Pixérécourt, father of le mélodrame*

IN the full red, green, blue, and yellow glare of Thuringian hussars, Neapolitan banditti, Burgundian innkeepers; Calabrian peasants, Rhineland castles, Alpine forests, and Dutch windmills, where narrow torrents gleam sapphire under a primrose sun flanked by pink clouds, or else bear innocence away in little boats from crimson explosions in turquoise moonlight—in this blaze of glory, melodrama begins at last. Le mélodrame of the French stage historian (with his rule of making the subject fit the label) consists of pieces with descriptive music between the passages of dialogue. It is the djinn in a bottle stoppered under the mighty name of René Charles Gilbert de Pixérécourt, potent wizard of that “Twopence Coloured” mirage never beheld on either land or sea by any mere open-air traveller—a mirage fermented in his frenzied mind by long brooding over the captives-in-castles of the Gothic revival. Reversing the laws of Nature he ended Otranto’s midnight in resplendent sunset. “Genius” is the title bestowed upon him by himself. Yet he was, beyond all dispute, at once the Napoleon and the Shakespeare of le mélodrame. Wrapped majestically in his cloak, he strode through the Boulevard of blood-tub theatres visibly conscious of destiny. No scoffers were there. All made way. All quailed to meet the eyes, raw through long sleeplessness, in his florid choleric face. That scorched gaze read the heart, divined evil at a glance; was, in fact, the anger of righteousness which shielded innocence, flayed the wicked alive. All who had wept and stormed while watching the battle between virtue and vice on his stage, knew Pixérécourt to be the master, great and good. Were they wrong? Turn to his plays and the wonder is that so much emotional pother could have been made over such delicate idle pleasures as they are now.

When reading them we picnic in bomb craters. Performances beyond count in the remote nineteenth century prove their powers. In the theatres of the world for over fifty years Shakespeare alone could claim to be his rival.

In Lorraine, where he was born in 1773, his family had won respect for their name and crest by services in council and in arms. His father was a major whose rigid ideas of discipline embittered the childhood of René Charles Gilbert. At the outbreak of the Revolution he was sent across the frontier to enlist in the legion of Condé. After serving for eight months, he obtained leave, tramped to Nancy disguised as a beggar, took out a Republican passport and entered Paris as an author. No sooner had his first play been accepted for the Théâtre Molière than Villeneuve found his loyalty suspect because one of his actors was on the way to the guillotine. La citoyenne Villeneuve hastily wrote another of her dramas of patriotism and Pixérécourt was drafted into the Republican cavalry. Still his MS. stood him in good stead. When all ancient families were exiled he claimed exemption as an artist because he had had one play accepted. Now he was free to write others. He dramatized Lewis's "The Monk", only to find he had laboured in vain because several other playwrights had already done so. At last one of his plays was acted. Its villain was so determined to rob the heroine of her honour that he imprisoned her in a dungeon, but the title was different.

Paris had been cleared of armed mobs by Napoleon's whiff of grape-shot. The Terror was over. Citizens could again be solely excited over imaginary castles, forests, and brigands. The most popular writer at this time was François Guillaume Ducray-Diménil, editor of the "Journal des Petites Affiches". His tales, specializing in *la voix du sang* between long-lost child and unknown parent, were seized hungrily by theatrical hacks. Background and characters were still Gothic, although the captives were, instead of women whose honour was at stake, either defenceless children or unbefriended mutes: his argument was not against sexual rapacity but unfeeling lawlessness. Pixérécourt turned his "Victor; ou, l'Enfant de la Forêt" into a drame lyrique. When it was about to go into rehearsal the players pre-

ferred another version and he, set upon punishing them for their "félonie", speedily had his put on (leaving the music behind, though the composer had been his one supporter) at the Ambigu, where it ran for over a year. Victor, the adopted son of a virtuous baron whose daughter he hopes to marry, discovers that his real father is Roger, a brigand who defends the weak against the strong. By what right? "My love for humanity." When this was followed by *Le Château Des Apenins; ou, Le Mystères D'Udolphe*, the end of the old order of things belonging to Mrs Radcliffe was demanded by a vaudeville with the title *À bas les diables, à bas les bêtes, à bas la poison, à bas les prisons, à bas les poignards*. Had the public become bored by endless repetitions? Times had changed but not theatres. Though law and order were established, the sole effect of this on the popular drama of Paris was a less defiant tone in the sentiments of brigands. Imagination proved too powerful to be influenced by the cataclysms and upheavals of reality.

There were more and more theatres and therefore more and more audiences. To these playgoers the oldest tricks were new; playwrights had no longer to rack their brains in order to discover how to keep people awake. The criticism of *À bas les diables* could be ignored; yet even that piece did not cry *à bas* moral fervour. The same tale was still told over and over again with the same accessories. Whenever there was a variant it had to be repeated over and over again before another could be tried. Perhaps to a Paris that had no Bastille the dungeon scene made less appeal; it would still recur times without number, but now and then it might be omitted. Thanks to those pages in the history of the mélodrame by Paul Ginisty which show the differences of plot in a story by Ducray-Duminil and the play made out of it, we can see how Pixérécourt responded to this slight change in what the public wanted when he adapted "*Coëlina; ou, L'Enfant du Mystère*". In print the heroine's mother had to be released from a souterrain; on the stage she died before the rise of the curtain. Coëlina lives in the house of her guardian, where a poor mute, rescued after ruffians had left him for dead, has found refuge. Calumny, which reveals that he is her father when falsely stig-

matizing her as illegitimate, drives them forth homeless together. To the same wild spot where they wander beside a bridge over a torrent, their persecutor comes to repent in a storm. "Ah", he cries, "if we but knew what it would cost to cease to be virtuous, how very few villains you would meet on earth."

This piece installed the playwright permanently at the Ambigu as manager. Three years of ferocious energy had made him not jack but master of all stage trades. As such he ruled the whole theatre, establishing himself as stage-director in an age when the rôle was generally unknown. Scene-painters, costumiers, carpenters and machinists—particularly these last, for he insisted on "practicable" scenery—obeyed his command. None of the actors who ruled elsewhere was so hard to please. Pride of authorship made him demand thunder and lightning more terrifying than before, and military training enabled him to drill smartness and vigour into scenes of bloodshed. What is not so easy to explain is his ordering of ballets, introduced into all his plots, and his elaborations of incidental music. The pretty trifle invented by Rousseau for *Pygmalion* now became a power to subdue or rouse the multitude. Strings and wood-wind were employed to presage human distress or imitate storms in between utterances. The orchestra industriously worked upon the audiences' feelings; the play took its label from the music cue and was denominated *mélodrame*—all too soon a term of abuse, since it stood for unabashed assaults upon emotion. The *Dictionnaire Générale des Théâtres* of 1810 contemptuously declined to mention any such things.

One more plot from Ducray-Duminil graced the Ambigu in 1801 as *Le Pèlerin Blanc; ou, Les Petits Orphelins Du Hameau*. An old porter, pretending to be deaf and surly, actually owns the castle from whose gates he drives away two wandering boys, actually his sons. The poor waifs, their identity discovered, are endungeoned. The old porter, changing glasses so that the poison meant for them is swallowed by a false steward, suddenly appears in full uniform at the head of all the king's men. A German drama by Zchocke which broke away from the conventions of Gothic, became *L'Homme À Trois Visages*, *mélodrame* of dis-

guises. Vivaldi, exile, returns to Venice as Edan, soldier of fortune. To trick his enemies he also passes as Abelino, a notorious brigand. Pretending to be on the side of a conspiracy, he holds the Doge and the Senate at his mercy until the villain has shown himself in his true colours. Then Vivaldi, pulling off his false beard and throwing aside his cloak, reveals himself in words ("It is I") to be echoed down the years. In Pixérécourt's next piece at the Ambigu a blackmailer's "It is I" began an equally long life. This, *La Femme À Deux Maris*, brought bigamy into melodrama. Two such efforts exhausted their author's originality for a while. In *Des Mines De Pologne* at the Ambigu in 1803, husband and wife, imprisoned at different depths in ancient mines, are rescued by the tyrant's wife, upholder of virtue. In *Tekeli* later that year the heroine, besieged instead of imprisoned, held Mongatz against the Austrians while her husband, returning from captivity in Turkey, had to cross the "practicable" bridge to join her. After hiding in a barrel from the enemy patrols, he was carried across in a sack.

However far Pixérécourt might travel in his search for fresh plots in strange climes, Gothic claustrophobia persisted. The theme of deliverance from evil, which melodrama never discarded, still found the easiest way to express itself in escape from some restricted space even when dungeons were out-of-date. Some of his titles indicate his geographical range, others his conquest of history, but no matter how remote the time or place incarceration is regularly provided underground. On *Robinson Crusoë's* densely inhabited isle, Madame Crusoë and son are dragged down to captivity by the mutineers and pulled out again by noble savages. When the usual explosion occurs, rocks burst asunder to show the mutineers' ship in the distance, surrounded by canoes, and the long-boat close in shore. Strong family resemblances between *Robinson Crusoë* and *Le Château De Lock-Leven; ou, L'Évasion De Marie Stuart* could be traced in the female captive, the wild and sombre landscape, the liberating boat and the explosion. Such peculiar genius was his that upon these two very dissimilar stories he stamped his imprint until, apart from title and costumes, they looked uncommonly alike—

though the scenery, unlike the Surrey's oft-applauded kind, was always freshly picturesque.

Some critics were surprised that the people's playwright should be so ardent a bibliophile—as though a factory could be run without raw material. With all his jigs at hand to stamp it into Gothic patterns, he could make mélodrame out of any romance of fact or fiction. Having picked a subject, he would consult learned books of ethnology or archæology in order to claim erudite accuracy for everything, from a Babylonian ballet to the jabbering of cannibals. He was setting an example for producers in the style of melodrama throughout the century. What may be detected in this ardent quoting of chapter and verse for canvas and grease-paint is self-justification. Resenting critical contempt for popular entertainment, he acquired, and aired, vast quantities of historical and geographical facts; these he exploited in scenes of other times and other places, for which he claimed scholarly and unnecessary exactitude. No authenticity was attempted in character and incident, but the ballet in *Robinson Crusoe* was to be enjoyed less for its own sake, or so he seemed to insist, than as a performance faithful to what was reported in a learned work on “Les Mœurs des Sauvages Américains”. Mid-way through his career he began a long reign at another theatre of the Boulevard, grim and deadly Gaité, where he magnified his mannerisms. Instead of being used to make one of the characters captive, the vast disused cistern in *La Citerne* trapped all of them. Instead of barrels of gunpowder, *Le Belvedere; ou, La Vallée De L'Etna* exploded a volcano. Instead of a savage island he staged in *Christophe Colomb; ou, La Découverte Du Nouveau Monde* a savage continent, complete with dialogue direct from a Dictionnaire Caraïbe:

*Oranko*.—Cati Louna!

*Kavaka*.—Amoulka azakia kereber

(*Oranko* hésité).

*Oranko*.—Inolaki . . . Chicalamai.

*Kavaka*.—Ilava a moutou. Koule ovekelli ?

When this piece failed, the master melodramatist turned from his bookshelves to exhume from newspapers the body-snatching of



Burke and Hare in Edinburgh. *Alice; ou, Les Fossoyeurs Écossais* has a mysteriously born heroine, servant at an inn. In order to succour Edouard, a medical student, wounded in a duel, she adds to her earnings by submitting her arm to be cut by surgeons who need to exercise their scalpels upon living subjects. Edouard recovers and forgets. Years later the resurrectionists bring him a body. He recognizes Alice. They have murdered what was left.

Mélodrame constantly widened its scope. Yet Pixérécourt gained his most lasting success when he returned, at the Gaîté, to the old lawlessness among mountains and forest in *Le Chien De Montargis ; ou, Le Fôret De Bondy*, tale of a wayside inn. Aubri, before being murdered by the treacherous Macaire, entrusted his papers and gold to Eloi, the dumb boy, who is convicted and sentenced to death because they are found in his possession. Dragon, the dog star, with such simple little tricks as jumping over a gate, trying the latch of a door, ringing the bell, seizing a lantern in his teeth and jumping back again over the gate, discloses Macaire's guilt. Though dog dramas had been seen before, the popularity of this one drove Goëthe from his post as director of the Weimar Court Theatre. Under the title of *Aubry De Montdidier's Dog; or, The Forest Of Bondy* it was touring Germany with a trained poodle in the name part—now enlarged to include the rescue of a child by drowning from an earlier canine drama. The Duke of Weimar, as a dog-lover, was anxious to see these tricks. After the first performance (before a disapproving audience) Goëthe resigned. More trouble was caused in Dublin where the dog's non-appearance in 1814 caused riots for a fortnight. Then the piece was equestrianized. The murderer, mounted on live horseflesh, wore a piece of dead horseflesh under his collar, against the moment when the dog would seize him by the throat and have its virtue rewarded.

For a time *Le Chien De Montargis* was outshone by a mélodrame that starred a mere property bird. Of this, a piece unusually simple and prettily childlike called *La Pie Voleuse; ou, La Servante De Palaiseau*, Ginisty gives account. The manager of the Porte-Saint-Martin found that his desk had been opened by his son, who had dug out his father's play and was now crying over it.

That caused the MS. to be left, without name or address, at the Ambigu where Caigniez (author of *Le Jugement De Salamon*) had rewritten it and handed parts to players before the author, answering an advertisement, joyfully agreed to an arrangement which caused *La Pie Voleuse* to be Caigniez's evermore. Its outstanding popularity was evident even during the Hundred Days when the emperor of make-believe seemed to meet his Waterloo in *Christophe Colomb*.

There is little more in *La Pie Voleuse* than falsely-accused innocence. The maid's father, a fugitive who has drawn his sword upon a superior officer, gives her a silver spoon, which she sells to provide him with money. The magpie flies across the stage to the table, set for a bridal feast in the garden, and carries off one of the landlady's silver spoons. Just as the maid, found guilty, is about to die, the magpie is seen to carry a coin through the window of a belfry and there the spoon is found. The story has a villain who withholds the pardon granted to the father, but no blood and thunder.

ACT V. SCENE II

*The style known as "Twopence Coloured"*

WHAT dark conspiracy was there against Pixérécourt in England to rob him of the laurel and the rose? Of course, his plays were pilfered times without number; naturally a master who could show the fall of vice from her sovereign sway in such pleasantly lurid forms was bound to fall among literary thieves. That was not merely unchecked by law; it had become hallowed by custom. But since the victim was unprotected, there was no need while picking his pockets to cold-shoulder him as well. Other Parisians, such as Caigniez, had some notice taken of them when but one of their plays was transferred to the English stage, so there was no rooted objection to giving

credit where credit was due. Yet the French playwright, to whom most was owing, whose dog star, whose "prince within a barrel pent" (as Byron wrote), whose wandering boys were perfidious Albion's constant delight, was ignored. Diligent search has not found his name on any English playbill, or in any critique; it is usually omitted from our reference books, theatrical or biographical, throughout his century. Infamous criminals of intolerable notoriety have not been so utterly blacked out. "Never heard of him" was the Victorian attitude to him as to unspeakable cads.

All the greater must be the tribute paid to him now. Since not a single play of his was staged (as some of Shakespeare's might be, for its author's sake, it follows that each succeeded solely on its merits. And succeed they did—a baker's dozen of them. What if they are dead now, so dead that Hollywood has filmed none of them, does that lessen the amazing totals? Each of that dozen would multiply into half-a-dozen at least as it crossed the Channel, and each of these would have a busy life of its own. One of the lingering traces of their great vogue was the popularity of Selina, derived from Cœlina, as a Victorian Christian name. That has gone. All that now remains is Will Atkins (formerly Will Alkins in his dramatized Defoe) in the Christmas pantomime of *Robinson Crusoe*. Yet players still living acted in his most hardy piece, and curiosity about this one, in particular, may still be aroused when a reader comes across a reference in Dickens to a schoolboy's white mouse, which had made a very creditable appearance on the stage as the dog of Montargis, and might have achieved greater things but for having had the misfortune to mistake his way in a triumphal procession to the Capitol, when he fell into a deep inkstand and was dyed black and drowned.

Undoubtedly it was pilfering from Pixierécourt which first brought the term *mélodrame* across the Channel. The piece in question has consequently passed as the first English melodrama, although it is less typical of the native species than works of earlier date. What has to be borne in mind is that a mere text was brought from the Boulevard, not the whole performance; what had drawn tears there suffered such a sea-change that it merely

titivated the senses here. The process affords an instructive lesson in stage presentation. The piece itself had undergone no essential alteration. Three acts were reduced to two by omitting the ballet, and it was transformed mainly because its surroundings had been transformed. Instead of being played at the English equivalent of the *Gaîté* or *Ambigu*, it was put on at a *Theatre Royal*. Instead of being billed as a great attraction, it was merely an after-piece. Popular fancy accepted the works of Pixierécourt, especially because of his musical device, as a substitute for *Harlequin*, *Pantaloön*, *Clown*, and *Columbine*. The scourge of evil-doers for the First Empire became for the Regency a thing, morally, of naught.

What prejudiced *mélodrame's* chance of being taken seriously in London was the craze for dumbshow created by the song-and-dance spectacles of Cross. The taste for these had spread from the burletta houses to the *Theatres Royal* where secondary companies were formed under the heading of "Pantomime". Clowns and dancers who were the favourites of summer-holiday makers in Lambeth and Islington, found winter employment in the classic temples of the drama where they regularly wound up the long performances, often outshining the comedy or tragedy that preceded them. The devising of these spectacles was a shorter cut to fame than the hard road of the playwright. A small boy, sent for by Covent Garden whenever a babe appeared among *dramatis personæ*, made himself useful as prompter's assistant, picked up a knowledge of pantomime, turned "*The Monk*" into one, and so became respected as Farley, the expert in such matters. John Fawcett, the comedian who made his name in bluff English characters, followed suit. While reading a "*Treatise on Sugar*", he was inspired by a tale of Jamaica to compose *Obi; or, Three-fingered Jack* for the Haymarket in 1800. The "*Obi woman*" caused one actor who played her to be known as "*O. Smith*" all his life and after, and Jack, a ferocious fugitive-slave thirsting for revenge against the killers of his wife and children in Africa, was so much more credible than any Gothic Blue Beard that he begat a line of villains with a justifiable hatred of humanity. Otherwise the piece merely fuses Gothic with the West Indian and the Naval. The heroine, disguised as a Jack Tar to trace the wounded lieutenant,

becomes a captive in a cave, and the ocean is brought in, when a boy, flung by Three-fingered Jack from a rock, swims to the little boat. These pieces survived the day of the song-and-dance spectacle and then acquired dialogue so haphazardly that some scenes would be in dumbshow and some spoken, at first according to whim and then according to tradition.

It was the influence of Pixierécourt which caused the song-and-dance style to be discontinued. When the mélodrame method was tried, its novelty at once made the other old-fashioned. Tit-for-tat, it was the influence of song-and-dance spectacle which caused the first pilferings from Pixierécourt to be accepted rather as musical after-pieces than demonstrations of moral intensity. Appropriate music, noises off and practicable scenery—mere garnishings for the upholding of virtue on the Boulevard—were all that playgoers originally remarked in English mélodrame.

The first theft was committed by Thomas Holcroft, Newmarket stable-boy, shoemaker's apprentice, school-teacher, journalist, and strolling player, whose comedy, *The Road To Ruin*, deprived future melodrama of an effective title. He served the cause of freedom by surrendering himself for trial when menaced by a trumped-up charge of high treason. "One of the most candid, most upright, and single-meaning men I ever knew", Lamb wrote of him, and declared, "I believe he never said one thing and meant another in his life". With Holcroft's mélodrame, *A Tale Of Mystery* (Covent Garden, 1802), things are different. In the published version he states, "I cannot forget the aid I received from the French Drama from which the principal incidents, many of the thoughts, and much of the manner of telling the story, are derived. I exerted myself to select and write masterly sketches, that were capable of forming an excellent picture; and the attempt has not failed". Actually *A Tale Of Mystery* is a scrawled version of *Cœlina*, such as a pirate might scribble from memory over his supper after the performance. Long soliloquies become short (which improved them for the critics), while the dialogue becomes disjointed. The name of the villain is remembered, but Cœlina is changed into Selina—similar to the ear, though the eye sees all the difference between a hint of stomach troubles in

one spelling and the moon over Athens in the other. The change in his father's name from Dufour (which literally translated into modern English means "of the flop") to Bonoma is another "improvement"; and though it puzzled London playgoers to find a minor character with the name of Exempt, this is the rank we call Exon in the Yeomen of the Guard. One of his stage directions deserves to be quoted. Amid terrible lightning, thunder, hail, rain, and suitable music, the fugitive villain enters "pursued as it were by heaven and earth".

The manner of "telling the story" was not grasped at once. Pixierécourt's way of cutting off the supply of speech directly anything important had to be done with swords or pistols was intensified by Holcroft to a state where it appeared simply that some scenes had words and some had not. Hence the bewildering effect of his technique upon *Obi* and *Perouse* when brought up-to-date. Stranger still, hence the chequered silences and eloquences in the romantic drama of *Valentine And Orson*, composed by Dibdin's son, Thomas, for Covent Garden in 1804, and acclaimed as "one continued scene of unmitigated splendour". After the Grand March of Valentine's return with captive Saracens, the king's sister relates how in years gone by she lost her twins in the forest. Valentine forswears the love of a princess until he can prove that "gentle blood flows in his veins". Then in elaborate dumbshow he traces Orson to the wilds, where Orson cherishes the old she-bear who once suckled him. During the Fierce Combat, Orson is startled to see himself mirrored in polished shield. Valentine defeats Orson by threatening to kill the poor old bear who conveniently dies after Orson has been bound. "Orson shakes her, puts the food and bottle by her, throws himself on the ground and seems to weep." He is taught to shake hands; when the Princess greets Valentine with an embrace, he wants to copy this also and is much displeased at being repulsed. Princess Eglantine dons Valentine's armour and fights to rescue the Lady Florimanda for fear Valentine will fall in love with her. All this and more (much more) was told in alternate scenes of dialogue and dumbshow, with mixed scenes to follow.

Another pilferer from Pixierécourt was Theodore Hook. From

*Tekeli; or, The Siege Of Montgatz*

Drury Lane 1806

boyhood he had provided his father, a composer, with libretti, and he was eighteen when Drury Lane staged his English version of *Tekeli; or, The Siege Of Montgatz* in 1806. It inspired Byron's:

Gods! O'er those boards shall Folly rear her head  
Where Garrick trod, and Kemble lives to tread:  
      these shall Farce display buffoonery's mask  
And Hook conceal his heroes in a cask:

At the age of nineteen, Hook made *The Fortress* for the Haymarket out of *La Forteresse Du Danube*. His stage career, interrupted by his appointment as Accountant-General of Mauritius, was resumed when a deficiency of £12,000 was shown by his accounts. After a spell in prison he was released—a subordinate had been found guilty—though still required to pay the Government's claim. He wrote some more plays as well as novels, but no more mélodrames.

*The Wandering Boys*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Dog Of Montargis*, and other masterpieces of the Napoleon of the Boulevard du Crime found several English authors apiece to give them several highly successful careers on the English-speaking stage. How soon

*The Wandering Boys*

Covent Garden 1813

Pixerécourt's moral influence asserted itself is shown in a grand melodramatic romance of *The Forty Thieves* (Drury Lane, 1806), which a fairy introduces with the uncalled-for remark:

In virtue's eye  
The good are great—the great not always good.

Robbers capture a princess, who says to their chivalrous captain, "You saved my life; be not the destroyer of my honour", to which he replies, "That's dearer to me than the life-blood of my heart".

As "one of the most successful and agreeable melodramas ever put on the English stage", James Kenney's *Ella Rosenberg* (Drury Lane, 1807) excites curiosity and proves to be merely another Maid and Magpie without the magpie. Kenney was born in Ireland in 1780. He became a bank clerk when his father settled in London as manager and part proprietor of Boodle's. The son made his mark with *Raising The Wind*, a comedy staged at Covent Garden in 1807. He died in 1849 from a complication of diseases, after years of such straitened circumstances that he had while dying to supply the constant demands of managers. Another of his



mélodrames, *The Blind Boy*, illustrates what a feeble plot gained from intoxicating treatment. Water was the stimulant—and canvas water at that. Act I had a small river (with a bridge in very bad repair for no reason at all) and Act III showed the banks of the Vistula with the river dashing against rocks in great fury. The blind boy is seen by flashes of lightning on the summit of a rock. "I think", he says, "I stand on the edge of some frightful precipice. I will advance a few steps more."

Some resemblances to this were shown by *The Broken Sword*; or, *The Torrent Of The Valley* some years later with a dumb orphan for hero. Of William Dimond, its author, terrible things are printed in "Bunn on the Stage". His enormities are said to have broken his mother's heart, and to have caused his father to kill himself by cutting his throat. The wretched son had since been in many jails and tried in many courts "under many names, for heinous crimes—out of which he escaped by mere miracles; his deeds at Bath, the early and great scene of his profligacy would fill a volume". In Dimond's works it is hard for the reader to distinguish drama from mélodrame, for although different in performance they are very similar in print. The Gothic sunset continues to blaze; the only change is that in drama there is (measuring by pages) more of it. *The Foundling Of The Forest*, Dimond's drama for the Haymarket in 1809, has three full-to-the-brim-and-foaming acts about Baron Longueville (whose name ought to have become proverbial for all-absorbing and utterly inexplicable hate) ending in, "Already I endure my heaviest curse. I view the objects of my hatred crown'd with joy".

Playwrights who tried to emulate Pixérécourt instead of stealing from him, created this same heavily charged atmosphere of terror and passion by causing their characters to behave mysteriously without motive. Arnold, manager of the Lyceum and son-in-law of Pye, the Poet Laureate, invented the most inexplicable plot of all in *The Woodman's Hut* at Drury Lane in 1814. The heroine, long supposed dead, lives secretly in a forest, midway between the castle of the hero and the castle of the villain. The hero is kidnapped and brought to her cottage. She escapes with him during a storm. The wall of the cottage is destroyed by a

*The Miller And His Men*

Covent Garden 1813

thunderbolt and outside the fugitives can be seen in a boat, violently tossed on furious waves in the river. The forest catches fire. Part of the bridge is burned down. From what remains, hero, heroine, and friends, "in a group, expressing joy and gratitude", watch the flames advance upon the villains.

Unfathomable psychology was not implacably demanded. That is proved by the one enduring drama of the Gothic sunset. It was written by Isaac Pocock, who is remembered for nothing else although he wrote two plays a year, and continued to do so after he had come into some property at Maidenhead on the death of his uncle, Admiral Pocock. Bunn says of him, "The best evidence that can be adduced of Mr Pocock's respectability and station in private life is, that he was Deputy Lieutenant of the County of Berks, and one of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace". What bearing this has on his prestige as a playwright may not be at once apparent, but the fact remains that whereas Dimond's plots were wildly irrational, Pocock's were well ordered and above reproach, even when he chose Bohemia for the setting of his masterpiece, *The Miller And His Men*. No one who has witnessed a performance of it in a toy theatre could doubt that it is a masterpiece, and as playwrights of that generation were in-

fluenced in their impressionable years by the vogue of the Juvenile Drama, there need be no surprise that the play suits the "Penny Plain, Twopence Coloured" manner perfectly though originally an afterpiece in 1813 at Covent Garden. There is always a certain liveliness in the story which tells how Lothair, in order to rescue his beloved Claudine from the robbers' den below the mill, joins the band with a secret resolve to fire their powder magazine and blow them skyhigh. There is a directness, well suited to acting in cardboard, about the dialogue with its sentiments. Claudine asks, "Do riches without love give happiness?" Ravina, the Miller's prisoner, cries, "I pine for virtue and freedom", and when she takes a torch to the barrels, a robber tactlessly commands, "Fiend! Descend instantly. In darkness and despair anticipate a dreadful punishment". But what is said can never compare with what is seen amid that model scenery. The Miller's men, first small ("in perspective") and then three times the size, cross the river in boats and land near Claudine's cottage. They no longer sing Bishop's glee, "When the wind blows", though a gramophone record should be made for this express purpose, but they do "exeunt in boat". The Miller appears in perspective, takes boat and disappears, his boat passes in the distance, then he appears in it full size. This is not juvenile, for no child can understand why the boatman should be in two sizes. The toy theatre is an art, as miniatures are an art. To the drama it is Cinderella's slipper.

Time stands still on that Radcliffe highway amid bright green forests, bright brown rocks and other scenic splendours whose primary colours outshine the yellow sun. No period of history can claim their ornaments of humanity; they are not the past as long as hussar uniforms are worn or as long as peasant girls from Calabrian mountains come flitting down to wayside fountains like butterflies. Pixérécourt was the poet of the peasant. The idea did undoubtedly come from Mrs Radcliffe, but he it was who picked out all the real bits of Europe that escaped the ravaging hands of men of destiny; and he created landscapes to match, brighter and apter than brilliant emerald pools or pink peaks in the Dolomites. This country of the mind may yet be stumbled upon in odd corners of the Continent as well as in the toy theatres of

the Juvenile Drama—survival of an older day, diminished in size (like the trophies of Amazon head-hunters) but magnified in glamour. It cannot weary us as the reality once wearied audiences in adult theatres. Dutton Cook, a critic who usually favoured antiquarianism, was tired of its conventions: combats with musical accompaniments, blows keeping time with the tune, fought with iron swords that seemed all basket-hilt; vaguely Calabrian backgrounds, ruined huts, robbers' caves, mountain gorges; and "bandits and desperadoes, armed to the teeth and black of look as worsted ringlets and burnt cork could make them, strangely costumed in slashed tunics freckled with brass discs or bosses, buff boots and deep gauntlets, and hats of the inverted flower-pot or of the flapping sombrero shape, heavily laden with flowers". But Dutton Cook saw the death of the tradition. We see in the "Penny Plain, Twopence Coloured" sheets, its hey-day. The period of the Juvenile Drama is a century long and its styles range from crime to Crimea. You can tell from it how *The Children In The Wood* appeared to Elia's gaze and what pranks General Burgoyne played with *Richard Cœur-de-Lion* from Marie Antoinette's Paris; likewise how London's Christmas pantomimes celebrated the removal of the Crystal Palace to Sydenham and the erection of Nelson's Column, but of all the popular entertainments it records those that bear the imprint of Mrs Radcliffe are the most appealing. They symbolize the meeting of two ages where Gothic streams from receding feudal ranges run into that broad river, the Rights of Man. It may seem absurd to read this grandiose allegory into such toys, but that is unmistakably their import. Their virtue triumphant is Rousseau. Their brigands are Schiller's and their castles are Walpole's. The conflict between right and wrong, with incomprehensible villainy on one side and innocence suffering mysteriously on the other, can be explained only by reference to the eighteenth century's battle of ideals.

## ACT VI. SCENE I

*Unmarried mother with baby in the snow*

WHY in all these Twopence Coloured mélodrames were there no spooks? Like all self-respecting French playwrights of his own and earlier days, Pixérécourt did not believe in ghosts; and English authors such as Pocock and Dimond, who imitated his style, eschewed them also. Yet, as the plays of centuries prove, nothing seems more natural to the English stage than the supernatural. Both the Regency and the Elizabethan player persistently brought back the departed from the undiscover'd country although agreed that from its bourn no traveller returned. But the "walking" was done with a very decided difference. Shakespeare's ghosts, who either nerve the beholder to revenge or unnerve him to receive it, have little in common with Monk Lewis's, who bestir themselves for the oppressed against oppression. Gothic ghosts were (though but slightly by comparison with Dickens' ghosts) moral—so much so that something had to be invented to serve as an anti-moral ghost. Blasts from hell, accordingly, brought creatures for this express purpose. If you wish to test the idea beyond its immediate scope, try whether the new Mephistopheles, as well as Vanderdecken, Frankenstein's monster, various vampires, Zamiel, and Robert the Devil did not spring from the new impulse towards maintaining the balance between good and evil. For clearer testimony turn to Southey's wild and wondrous song of 1801, "Thalaba the Destroyer". Against good, represented by Allah (who could be called upon in fiction without impiety), raw recruits of the queerest kind were called up from below to be bad. From these, directly or indirectly, the stage derived whole legions of devils, evil spirits, and demons.

Such antics were second nature to Monk Lewis, who published

his "Tales of Wonder" in 1802. Out of one of these he created for Drury Lane in 1807 the grand romantic mélodrame of *The Wood Demon; or, The Clock Has Struck*, expanded four years later into *One O'Clock; or, The Knight And The Wood Demon* for the Lyceum—soon to be London's leading haunt of horrors under the name of English Opera House. Sangrida, with ravenous wood demons mewing round her, promises them the blood of Hardyknute, usurper of Holstein, who now returns in triumph, exhibiting a captive giant—simply because Belzoni, the Strong Man of the fairs who was destined to open the Pyramids, had let out his massive bulk for hire upon the stage. Wrapped in a black cloak, masked and holding a dark lantern, Hardyknute descends with Leolyn, rightful heir, in a four-poster down to where snakes curl round a clock whose hands point to three-quarters past twelve. The boy pushes the hour hand forward. On the stroke of one the snakes twist themselves round the villain, whom Sangrida stabs.

Again in 1811 Lewis borrowed from "Thalaba"—not magic this time, but plot. Since horses had become the most popular of actors, an equestrian spectacle had to be devised for Covent Garden. *Timour The Tartar* tells how the Khan of the Afghan Tartars becomes the Oppressor of Mingrelia after killing its prince. Timour is a Great Man. "I'd rather", his poor old father tells the gallery, "have had him a Good One." Agib, the youthful prince, is a captive until rescued by his mother; when she is captured he leads his troops against the castle; she jumps from the battlements; he leaps his horse into the water where she is struggling and saves her. The gist of the story is Southey's, but without the abracadabra the plagiarism passed unnoticed.

Such an impression was left on the public mind by Lewis's works that when he died in 1818, homeward bound from Jamaica, rumour provided circumstances of terror and mystery. His slaves, promised their freedom as a bequest in his will, were supposed to have used poison to make sure he would not change his mind. That he died at sea of yellow fever is evident in the testimony of those who heard "fearful imprecations burst from his lips" and believed he was being punished for the "atheistical

sentiments which had, at an earlier period, pervaded his compositions", and if he ever had the purpose of freeing the negroes on his plantations it is not evident in his will, which disposes of "sugar-works, penns, lands, slaves, cattle, stock, and other effects" without distinction between human life and inanimate property. The unco' guid who had condemned him for evil offences, had not been troubled by his ownership of slaves, although he challenged comment by incongruously introducing negroes into *The Castle Spectre*. His burial was tinged with horror. After the ceremony passengers saw from the window of the front cabin a spectre-like object borne up by the swell almost to their level. Wind had caught the coffin's canvas-covering like a sail and it danced in "fearful mockery" round the ship. Byron had already bestowed upon him this epitaph:

Even Satan's self with thee might dread to dwell,  
And in thy skull discern a deeper hell

which jests at what the public believed in earnest. Given the taste of the times as the cause, his deeper hells are the natural effect—peep-shows for easily awe-stricken souls who at his death felt "a deep conviction of the Almighty displeasure".

When black magic was at one end of the swing of the pendulum, domestic drama was at the other. In 1801, the year of Southey's demonic callisthenics, Mrs Opie wrote "Father and Daughter". Although it merely adapts "The Vicar of Wakefield" to suit the taste for melodramatics, her story was said to have "drawn so many tears that if we could convert them into pearls, they would form the richest coronet that was ever bestowed by the hand of sympathy to grace the brow of genius". It foreshadows "a beautiful, cheerful, clever old lady, as she reclined on her sofa and talked with all the vivacity of youth, in a bright joyous room, with a sweet joyous voice". That pleasant little outburst enlivens a *Universal Dictionary of Biography* when it describes a visit to Mrs Opie shortly before her death in 1853. Her long life was mostly spent in the retirement which often proved favourable to that wallowing of imagination in sanguinary ways which might be styled inkshed. She mastered this style, though it

was quite another which caused her name to be breathed rapturously across the counters of circulating libraries while Napoleon peered from Boulogne. To understand the vogue of Amelia Opie, hark back to the heroines of Richardson. They clearly show how thoughts in popular imagination follow each other like sheep. Female chastity had been discussed before and would be again, but never with such all-absorbing intensity.

Here, in order to ward off the charge of ill-timed and misplaced levity, note the difference between a subject as it exists and as it is reflected in minds that act as distorting mirrors. What a father feels about an erring daughter is one thing; what Dr Johnson feels about what that father ought to feel is another. Similarly, people in entire agreement with the sentiment about to be quoted concerning *Indiscretion* by Prince Hoare (Drury Lane, 1800) may yet smile when reading, "To quit the roof of a parent is the most alarming indiscretion of which a female can be guilty; she forfeits the regard of the author of her being; and is thus too apt to supply the loss, by accepting a protection which brings with it dishonour and ruin". The betrayed female had had a surfeit of publicity. Eighteenth-century virtue had made her the equivalent of the defaulting solicitor. Yet deep as the pathos of her plight had become it was nothing to what Mrs Opie could do for her. Only a sweet joyous nature in bright joyous surroundings could have laboured at pictures, for developing the "virtuous affections", of such harrowing distress as to make an unmarried mother trudge with her child in her arms through the snow.

Home had never spelt domestic tyranny to the author. Her mother's early death placed Miss Alderson, says the *Universal Dictionary of Biography*, at the head of her father's household. She thus came very early to take a prominent place in Norwich Society, "at that time characterized by a prevalent gaiety not untempered by a taste for intellectual pursuits". Into this she entered with full zest and soon became the ornament and pride of her circle. Because of these intellectual pursuits she met the painter who had transformed himself from Oppy, the self-taught Cornish Wonder, into John Opie, R.A. During their happy married life, which lasted from 1798 to his death in 1807, she turned author.



*The Lear Of Private Life*

Coburg 1820

Her first novel, "Father and Daughter", had an immense success and Mrs Opie remained the fashionable author until Scott took her place. Imitations still continued. The father-and-daughter theme was adopted by circulating-library novels and sixpenny simplicities. On the stage it became the domestic drama, a species which was so very plain that it rarely survived in the toy-theatre shops at all. George Soane's mélodrame, *The Falls Of Clyde*, at Drury Lane in 1818, has been thus preserved, but then this shapes Scott's scenery and Mrs Opie's plot into a Gothic pattern with gypsies instead of banditti and a cavern behind the Falls instead of den or dungeon. The best character is the old Scot who cannot and will not believe that his daughter has erred. The lover, wounded in a duel with her brother, is kidnapped by gypsies. The Clyde is seen by moonlight. A boat makes for the shore. The heroine rows to the Falls, and when the scene changes she comes through the mouth of the cave against its background of shimmering water to rescue her lover and save her brother at the last minute from a firing party.

It was not until 1820 that Mrs Opie's story was dramatized by William Thomas Moncrieff as *The Lear Of Private Life*; or,

*Father And Daughter* at the Coburg. Fitzarden, good old man, goes mad when his daughter takes to living in sin with Captain Alvaney, a weak, treacherous seducer who soon turns his affection elsewhere in the hope of marrying for money. Agnes Fitzarden, wandering with her baby in her arms through the snow (first time on any stage), loses her way in a forest where her father, a chain round his waist, raves. When Alvaney marries her she restores the good old man to his senses by posing as a portrait of herself in the manner of Shakespeare's Hermione.

A similar story served for *Clari; or, The Maid Of Milan*, the piece played at Covent Garden in 1823 (reasonably credited to John Howard Payne though claimed by J. R. Planché in his old age) which was called an opera out of compliment to Bishop's music for the song which dominates it. While living luxuriously in Paris the heroine sings "Home! Sweet Home!" and remarks, "It is the song of my native village—the hymn of the lowly heart". She goes to a cabinet, takes out a plain village dress, "places it on a chair, fixes her eyes on it intently and sobs heavily". The Duke, who had promised her marriage and whipped her off in a faint, now gives a fête in her honour. Villagers act a drama, the leading lady of which sings "Home! Sweet Home!" while a nobleman approaches to beguile her with an offer of marriage. Clari cries, "Fearful resemblance! Has there before been such another victim?" The girl in the play faints and is whipped off. The father in the play is about to curse her when Clari rushes on the stage and stops him. That night, murmuring, "Can a parent's blessing be denied when heaven forgives?" she escapes through the window into 'strong blueish moonlight, cast so powerfully upon the background that Clari is distinctly discovered getting over the balcony and letting herself slowly down by the scarf". Villagers are singing "Home! Sweet Home!" as she returns to hear her mother—her father knows her not—say, "Unhappy girl! I believe you innocent," which with a distant view of Milan on the back-cloth vindicates the title.

## ACT VI. SCENE II

*Thomas Dibdin's two hundred plays*

WHAT the Waverley Novels achieved was a revolt against mystery and terror. "More's the pity" will be the comment of romanticists with an ardent feeling for those Gothic mélodrames of tempest, fire and flood with villains drenching themselves in blood most mournfully; and their "Twopence Coloured" survival in toy theatres is undeniably a hallowed delight. But what can now be prized as a rarity was a plague in the days when Scott won popularity by bringing scenes and characters nearer to reality by leaving out brighter-than-life hues so as to show the bolder outlines of "Penny Plain"—genuine British mountains instead of Teutonic-cum-Calabrian ones. That warrants a place in the history of literature, and every history of the stage should at least mention the popularity of his works, longer poems as well as novels, when dramatized by Thomas Dibdin.

With all respect for his father's salted genius, and also for that seafaring uncle whose Christian name was bestowed alike on Tom Bowling and on the boy born on March 21, 1771, the theatrical family of Dibdins must be regarded as a matriarchy. Old Mrs Pitt, who sang "I tremble at Seventy-two" at Covent Garden after fifty years of a player's life, had a brother Pitt, and her daughter's three sons (who bestowed another generation of playwrights upon an appreciative public) were Pitts. A name so well suited to be a guiding star to mummers was worth preserving even though it meant irregularities that must have been, however blandly future generations may face them, distressing at the time. Cecil Pitt was Mrs Pitt's first grandchild. Then came Charles and Thomas, Charles Dibdin's sons, who surnamed themselves after him when they grew up. Whatever they suffered in childhood from paternal neglect, they had at birth the freedom of the theatre conferred upon them. Thomas had David Garrick for a

godfather and was, as Cupid in Shakespeare's Jubilee, led before the audience of Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, by Mrs Siddons. He recalled her majestic request in the dressing-room when one of his wings broke loose, "Ma'am, could you favour me with a pin?"

His maternal granduncle chose upholstery as a sound career, but how could a youth with free access to theatres on family orders settle down to that? Putting scissors and cloth in such hands inevitably meant a model theatre and that led to a row of great civic importance when the master destroyed his apprentice's property. Tom Dibdin turned strolling player on the strength of being able to sing his father's songs and paint scenery. He had an introduction from his half-brother to the Dover company which he had to follow afoot along the South Coast, falling in with smugglers on the way, before he could turn player. Whatever maliciously "unco' guid" biographers may have to say, he honoured his illegitimate father and the sentiment was the making of him: it moved him to write in his early twenties, a patriotic spectacle, *The Mouth Of The Nile*, and a war ballad, *The Snug Little Island*. With *The Death Of David Rizzio* and *Chevvy Chase*, round about 1795, he gave further proof of his taste for British themes. What he thought of the prevailing Gothic fashion was evident in his burlesque *Bonifacio And Bridgetine; or, The Knight Of The Hermitage; or, The Windmill Turret; or, The Spectre Of The North East Gallery*. Yet there is not even a hint in his reminiscences that he was consciously liberating the theatre from its foreign yoke. In spite of all temptations to belong to other nations he remained an Englishman without giving the matter a thought.

Not that he was patriotic without a thought. He made Jolly Jack Tars pop up in the most unexpected plays. One of them (retired) gives a hearty English atmosphere even to *The Cabinet*, which would otherwise have had a somewhat Italian air. This piece does its author great disservice, since it attracts notice as the most celebrated piece he wrote and proves on reading to be the worst. A contemporary critic, mentioning that the title was significant of the plot, pertinently added, "if the circumstances of a young lady being locked up in a cabinet and sent back to her

lover may be fairly called one". What explains its fame is the cast. At Covent Garden it was a vehicle for Incedon, Braham, Munden, Signora Storace (whom Reynolds painted as St. Cecilia) and other singers not so well remembered but possibly not unworthy of such immortal company. *The English Fleet In 1342*, with Munden as another Jolly Jack Tar, brought these four together again, with the added attraction of a duet between Incedon and Braham—a thing to be spoken of with bated breath.

No hard-and-fast line can be drawn between Tom Dibdin's libretti and his dramas, because operas then had abundant dialogue and plays plenty of songs. For this reason his *Humphrey Clinker*, a lively romp without a trace of the strain of dramatization, is as much a ballad-opera as his cockney burlesque of *Don Giovanni*; or, *A Spectre On Horseback*, which has a less engaging humour in spite of such succinct couplets as

You broke into the house—alarmed the fair—  
And kill'd her dad, because he cried "Who's there?"

These light entertainments were so successful that they made more impression on theatrical history than their author's more solid works. People who have never heard of his best plays are well aware that he wrote, for Grimaldi, the Christmas harlequinade of *Mother Goose*, which was regularly revived for over half a century. That was a remarkable achievement in its way and so was his spectacle of *Valentine And Orson*, half in dialogue, half in dumbshow, though largely a matter of combats, banquets, and processions.

Considerably more than two hundred dramatic entertainments by him have been listed in Professor Nicoll's histories of late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century drama. These pages of thoroughly assorted titles prove that Tom not only had a finger in every pie but could always pull out plums. Even the very Gothic twilight that he helped to dispel yielded him the liveliest of its shadows with the Dog of Montargis and the Magpie. Less notable mélodrames also occur in our author's prodigious output, which never slackened even during his years of management at the Surrey. How he kept pace with himself is partly explained by the

published version of *Don Giovanni* which states, "The SCENERY (having most of it appeared before) has been (of course) already received with unbounded acclamations of Applause, and will be repeated as often as the Manager can write pieces to introduce it". The middle period of Tom's career is packed with Scott. He dramatized *The Lady Of The Lake* at the Surrey in 1810 by making the verse serve as dialogue wherever possible and employing dumbshow wherever not. Rivalry was to his benefit. When Covent Garden's *The Heart Of Mid Lothian* failed, his was given over 170 nights in nine months, though it required little more than an amanuensis to construct it. He had no leisure to "begin a perusal of my prototype until Thursday, the last day of the year (1818); two days more elapsed ere I could commence the MS., which was finished and read in the green-room on the succeeding Wednesday, January 6, 1819".

A fortnight after their appearance as novels in the summer of 1819, *Montrose* and *The Bride Of Lammermoor* were staged one evening at the Surrey in the same bill. The next year Dibdin brought out *Old Mortality* and *Ivanhoe*. His masterly examples of pouring a quart into a pint pot might serve a disgruntled younger generation as "Scott without tears". But dramatizations, however able, make a poor claim on posterity's remembrance, and out of the best of two hundred works catalogued in Tom's "Reminiscences" very few have a literary value, however lively their theatrical interest. The best part of his life did not begin until his "Life" was ended. From this time he wrote more out of his own head than out of others, though never without "original sources". *The Two Gregories*, a ballad farce, full of such domestic humour as

Mistress: You must quit your place because your master's too fond of you.

Ma'id: You'll keep yours a long while then,

is one of the earlier examples of Tom Dibdin's ability to strike out for himself with a plot taken from the French. Yet he was no literary man. His not to reason why, his but to remit an opera by return post, write a second act while the first was rehearsing, keep pace with the composer in supplying words to music and, while

scenes were shifting, hammers sounding, Harlequin and Clown exchanging contortions and Columbine sighing, to devise new tricks, new transformations, new enchantment.

## ACT VI. SCENE III

*Playwrights and players of London's Minors*

TOY theatres, Monk Lewis, Southey, Scott, Tom Dibdin and Mrs Opie all influenced the farmer's stage-struck son who put the colour back into melodrama. Edward Ball left the farm to become a printer at Norwich. Having mastered stagecraft by means of the juvenile drama he turned Amelia Opie's "The Ruffian Boy" into a play for the local Theatre Royal. He met the author, who at that time was "worshipped in society, not only for her great talent and her polished manners, but for her peculiar beauty which could not fail to strike even a stranger". This always reminded him of a lovely Bacchante, "it was so voluptuous, yet so delicate and feminine". On her advice, plus a letter from her to secure him work as a printer, he went to London. At the Surrey he wrote *The Fortunes Of Nigel* which ran for 96 nights, whereupon Covent Garden asked for a melodrama. "Of what kind?" he wanted to know. "Look into the papers, incidents enough *invented* there!" he was told. "Look into the papers" was a motto fit for the Minors though they could not always be restrained from looking into history and Shakespeare instead, like the blank versifiers of Legitimate. "Look into the papers" was, in effect, what Elizabethans did, the difference being that whereas they had been individual the authors of melodrama were a class—writing not for playgoers but for a class. What, managers wanted to know, was of general interest? There had been a shocking murder in Herts with a moral against gambling. A Mr Weare had been set upon and murdered rather in the manner of George Barnwell, by a wretch overwhelmed with debts of honour, whose accom-

plice had turned King's evidence so that he was to hang for it. Ordered to write a play around the real shovel and the real cart, Ball indignantly quitted the Surrey in disgust. The piece, by another hand, was seen by but one overwhelming audience before the Lord Chamberlain put it down. No such scruples were felt in Shakespeare's day when Mr. Arden of Faversham's murder by a wife infatuated with her paramour was treated by the theatre with as much respect as if she had been Borgia or Plantagenet. But Ball would not agree for a moment that romance could go about in the clothes of every day. Appearances were everything, especially in crime. As long as costumes were provided he would invent horrors so much worse than any reported in the papers that he would be named "The Terrible Fitzball" (prefix supplied by himself). Not that he was tough in himself. Once he turned manager, but had to change his mind the next day when sick with excitement.

Over Fitzball and many another Minor dramatist the dominating influence was that robust player, Thomas Potter Cooke. He was born in 1786—St. George's Day, very properly, his birthday. No academic history of the stage hails him as a great actor; for all that he is of great importance here. From the start his true-blue destiny was recognized, for his father, a surgeon in Titchfield Street, Marylebone, had him educated at the school of the Marine Society and sent him to sea as a midshipman at the age of ten. In 1796 he sailed in the *Raven* for the blockade of Toulon, fought at St. Vincent, and was wrecked off Cuxhaven. For two days and nights the crew were "subject to incredible misery; the cold was intense, and while clinging to the fragments of their shattered ship, many brave seamen, wasted with toil, dropped in the chillness of death to a dark and stormy grave". How his stage career began was told by Tallis's "Illustrated Life" in London at his death in 1864.

When Cross was manager of the Royal Circus, dumbshow dramas were presented half-way through a programme of songs, dances, and feats of agility. After the interval a bell recalled the playgoers to their seats. "A man dashes on with the face of an Apollo, and the build of a young Hercules. The band plays a horn-





*T. P. Cooke*

pipe. He whirls like lightning between and over the eggs without touching one; he finishes and leaves the stage. Loud calls bring him back again. A man steps from behind the scenes and ties a handkerchief round the eyes of the performer; he repeats the dance and is equally successful in avoiding the eggs. He takes the binding from his head; breaks in a basin the eggs he has danced over, and with a graceful bend, and loud plaudits, he passes off. Reader, the dancer was a sailor; that sailor was T. P. Cooke."

When the Royal Circus changed into the Surrey he was hailed as the foremost exponent, not only of heroes in domestic drama but of monsters in the demonic. "Savage fellow T. P. Cooke" Fitzball had been told at Covent Garden when asked to bring that savagery before the public gaze, and the wild man of his play was but mild compared with the actor's most lurid ventures into the supernatural. Yet Cooke could be the heart and soul of virtue in parts written for him by John Baldwin Buckstone, a tradesman's son at Hoxton in 1802 who had run away from a solicitor's office to join a small stock company somewhere in Berkshire. With *Peter Bell The Labourer; or, The Murderers Of Massiac* in 1826, he began to write plays at the rate of three a year. For Cooke he wrote two admirable characters. One, in *The May Queen* at the Adelphi during the autumn of 1828, is a recruiting sergeant whose honourable intentions towards the village beauty are unjustly suspected; when arrested for drinking he fights his escort, is pardoned, given a commission, discovers he is a gentleman's son and wins the girl he loves. Even this soldier's engaging openheartedness was exceeded by the Irish Jack Tar that Cooke played in Buckstone's *Presumptive Evidence; or, Murder Will Out*, founded on one of Griffin's tales, at the Adelphi the same season. From the customary little boat he leaps ashore to be falsely accused of murder and is on his way to be hanged when the real murderer (who had disguised himself in the Tar's clothes) confesses at the foot of the gallows.

In Buckstone's *Luke The Labourer* at the Adelphi, T. P. Cooke played the sailor in pig-tail, monkey-jacket, and glazed hat who returns just in time to save his loved ones from the snares of the squire. Luke, hired ruffian, ruins the farmer and plans the rape of

his daughter, Clara, in revenge for having been discharged as a drunkard. "At one time, when a bit hadn't been in my mouth for two days, I sat thinking, wi' my wife in my arms—she were ill, very ill—I saw her look at me wi' such a look as I shall never forget—she laid hold o' this hand, and, putting her long thin fingers all around it, said 'Luke, would na' the farmer give you sixpence if he thought I were dying o' want?' I said I'd try once more—I got up, to put her in a chair, when she fell, stone dead, down at my feet." Clara cries, "Oh, Luke! Luke!—for mercy's sake no more—forgive him!" After a pause he continues, "I were then quite ruin'd. I felt alone in the world. I stood looking on her white face near an hour, and did not move from the spot an inch; but, when I *did* move, it were wi' my fist clenched in the air, while my tongue, all parched and dry, curs'd a curse, and swore that, if I had not my revenge, I wish'd I might fall as stiff and as dead as she that lay before me."

When the Adelphi lacked a drama suited to his powers, T. P. Cooke went in his smart chaise, drawn by a white horse, to the house of Fitzball and ordered a nautical piece. "A nautical piece?" asked Fitzball fretfully, unable to imagine that Cooke could play a sailor. Nor did the idea of dramatizing Fenimore Cooper's "The Pilot" appeal to him. Still he adapted it off-hand by changing Long Tom Coffin into an Englishman, his comrades into a British crew who raid the American coast, and all the ridiculous characters into Yankees, without altering them otherwise. Sir Walter Scott noted that Americans attempted a row, "which rendered the piece doubly attractive to the seamen of Wapping, who came up and crowded the house night after night to support the honour of the British flag". But it was Cooke's acting which gave the piece a run of two hundred nights. "The best Sailor, out of all sight and hearing, that ever trod the stage", is the verdict of North in "Noctes Ambrosianæ". To this the Ettrick Shepherd objects that yon was not "treddin". To see Cooke leap out of the boat and try to steady himself on his harpoon made the very forms in the pit seem to heave up and down as though the earth were "lowsen'd frae her moorins". The Shepherd grew amaist sea-sick.

## ACT VI. SCENE IV

*Vampire, Thalaba, Frankenstein, Zamiel and  
Vanderdecken*

BOTH the domestic and the demonic took twenty years to reach the stage. As the drama became more democratic it lagged behind the circulating library in styles and tastes—but this is only a partial explanation. The vogue of the supernatural in melodrama began in 1820 when Charles Nodier's *Le Vampire*, based on Hungarian legends, was acted in Paris. In the past vampires had become proverbial for demonstrating how preposterous lies can be supported by overwhelming masses of well-attested evidence. Their value as fiction was not realized until the Wizard of the North held the world's gaze astonished by the Tartan. The Gallic mind, like the chameleon which had easily adapted itself to its surroundings by changing colour until placed upon a kilt, was bewildered. When Paris wanted nothing so much as tales of the Highlands, *Le Vampire* became Scottish—much to the relief of Arnold, manager of the English Opera in the Strand, whose theatrical wardrobe was overstocked with the kilt. He gave the task of translation to James Robinson Planché, another graduate of the toy theatre. This stickler for accuracy, destined to become an authority on costume and armour as well as Somerset Herald, wished to shift the scene back to the east of Europe, until curtly informed that the public neither knew nor cared.

When *The Vampire; or, The Bride Of The Isles* was acted in 1820, T. P. Cooke was a vampire with unconstitutional leanings towards virtue. "Demon as I am . . . the little that remains of heart within this wizard frame sustained by human blood, shrinks from the appalling act . . . Margaret! Unhappy maid! . . . thy blood must feed a Vampire's life, and prove the food of his disgusting banquet". A little boat, seen at sea, gradually approaches while the monster hesitates so that "Margaret may (at least

awhile) be spared". He chivalrously bears off another female as his victim; is shot and left dying in the moonlight, which revives him; and then in Fingal's cave, after Margaret's father has thrust her true love under the waves, reappears to claim her. When struck by a thunderbolt he vanishes through a trap known as "the Vampire", invented especially for him. On the principle that the public cannot have too much of a good thing, Fitzball ordered brisk appearances and disappearances up and down vampire traps throughout his melodrama of *Thalaba The Destroyer* at the Coburg in 1822. Scene-shifters were the real heroes in this orgy which exhibited the galley of Thalaba sinking in the vast abyss, the openings of Zeinah's sepulchre and repeated resurrections of her venerable spirit; the cavern of the burning sword, the huge serpent of gold, the sumptuous altar changed to a splendid car, the appearance of Kawla in white linen, with black wand, dishevelled hair and dagger; the burning of the fortress, the mortal combat between Thalaba and the devil Abdalda, the restoration of Thalaba to his crown and his happy union with the Shepherd's daughter amid banners, lanterns, shouts, drums, and trumpets.

Next came the turn of "Frankenstein", the novel written by Mary Shelley while Byron's guest in Italy. It was dramatized at the English Opera, under the title of *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein*, by Richard Brinsley Peake, treasurer of that theatre. The proprietor gave him a bond for £200 in acknowledgment of his long and faithful service. The theatre was burned down during the night of February 16, 1830. In the morning Peake thrust the bond into the fire of his room, where he had asked the proprietor to breakfast, saying, "You have lost all by fire—let this go too". Peake died poor. "A singular circumstance", Planché comments dryly, "considering that he had been for so many years the treasurer of a theatre." In Peake's day T. P. Cooke gave the charnel-house monster a green, putrescent hue. "What", asked Oxberry, the actor, in his *Dramatic Biography*, "can be more dreadful than his manner of walking against the balustrade as if unconscious of the nature of the wooden obstruction until, forcing it down by mere manual power, he falls to the ground?"

All such horrors were eclipsed when Weber's *Der Freischütz*

*Der Freischutz ; or, Zamiel, The Spirit Of The Forest*

Lyceum (English Opera) 1824

came to the English Opera in 1824; the casting of the bullets marked the height of the supernatural drama. Glass stolen from a church-window, quicksilver, three charmed balls which have already hit their mark, the right eye of a lapwing and the left eye of a lynx are heated in the crucible. Clouds obscure the moon. Caspar, dropping the first bullet from the mould, cries "One". The word is echoed while monsters peer from the trees and ghoulish faces show in the rock for a brief instant, echoed again and again. "Two", Caspar mutters and echoes call up the Witch of the Glen with reptiles on the ground and serpents in the air. At "Three" a storm breaks the trees while ghouls and monsters reappear. At "Four" whips crack, harness rattles and hoofs thud as two wheels of fire roll by. At "Five" neighing, barking and the huntsman's cry sound in the darkness, and then a skeleton stag flees from skeleton horse and skeleton hounds. "The wild chase in the air—a fearful omen!" gasps Gaspar before he casts the sixth. Thunder, lightning, hail and rain precede the fall of meteors. Trees are torn up by the roots, rocks split in fragments. The torrent roars and turns to blood. Every horror of the glen reappears

*The Evil Eye*

as he casts the seventh and falls back in agony while in the fire that consumes a tree appears Zamiel—T. P. Cooke.

For the Adelphi Fitzball now designed a "piece of diablerie" which should not be by any means behind even Frankenstein in horrors and blue fire—*The Flying Dutchman; or, The Phantom Ship*. Nearly all the characters were able-bodied seamen except Cooke's; he had to play Vanderdecken, "which I don't believe he ever greatly fancied", comments Fitzball. There was trouble when the stage-carpenter's estimate ran to two hundred pounds for timber to build the phantom ship until Fitzball told the management how to make it out of a shadow thrown on union, a glazed calico. "Darken the scene by turning off the gas, then while your chorus, invisible in the darkness, sing, draw off the flats, and a gentleman I can recommend to you, will throw, with his magic lantern, on the invisible union, a better phantom ship than all the ship carpenters in Woolwich Dockyard could build with Peter the Great to assist them." Otherwise Fitzball's ideas of what goes on in the infernal regions are uncommonly like *One O'Clock*. Sangrida reappears as Rockalda, decked out in foam instead of foliage; the necromantic clock is now a necromantic book; and Vanderdecken suffers, like any Lewis villain, at the hands of a supernatural female.

*Bill Jones; or, The Spectre By Sea And Land*

Surrey 1834

Easter spectacles, customary at Drury Lane in the time of William IV, conformed to the same style of wonder. Buckstone was responsible in 1831 for *The Ice Witch; or, The Frozen Hand*. When Harold the Sea King is wrecked on an iceberg, Druda invites him to share her ice throne. He tires—one touch of nature to make the whole gallery, seated on cold stone steps, kin—and goes back to earth, warned that one touch of his hand will freeze anyone to death. After vanquishing his treacherous foe with a hand-shake, he makes the mistake of ardently clasping the heroine's hand. From the ice Harold's emaciated crew beckon him aboard the ship of the dead until Freya, the Sun God, and little Sun Spirits restore the lovers to an Arcadian landscape.

By 1834 enchantment had declined. What unhallowed sepulchres and devil's elixirs had come to was made clear at the Surrey by John Kerr's *Bill Jones; or, The Spectre By Sea And Land*. Harry Jones the pirate (T. P. Cooke) lures a lovely widow aboard his ship in order to force her, with the zest for propriety then expected from pirates, to marry him. He is thwarted by her servant William, whom he casts through a cabin window; William's



Spectre swears to haunt him "as sure as my name is Bill Jones". When the scene is the Widow Jones's cottage, there is a "Vampire tree" and garden chair for the spectre to come through. Harry Jones, bent on making restitution, visits the churchyard, where his mother's empty coffin rests on trestles. Bill's Spectre rises from coffin and sinks.

*Harry: I cannot believe my eyes; it must be some trick. (Pulls coffin over, showing bottom to audience, empty—In panic places coffin as before. The Spectre of Bill arises instantly—Harry starts back to R. corner afraid.)*

*Bill: Repent, atone, pray and be forgiven. (Sinks again. Business as before.)*

Harry wants to know who will receive his dying breath and Bill says he will.

## ACT VII. SCENE I

*Exciting sympathy for helpless childhood*

BOTH the demonic and the domestic deliver the same message. It can also be read in multitudes of books, poems, and plays belonging to the early-nineteenth century, stamping uniformity upon humble tales for the barely literate and tragedies in togas for the cultured. The whole output, plainly melodrama now, was not so at a time when critics saw some vital distinction between five acts of blank verse at Theatre Royal and some burletta ridiculed as "the drama of oppression" at a Minor Theatre, that laboured alike at the plot of deliverance from evil. The whole civilized world delighted while reading or playgoing in the same tale told and retold over and over again, times without number, essentially the same despite some changes of characters and settings. Virtue had to be rewarded all day and every day and villainy punished.

In the theatre old tales of another kind were acted. These, though they exploited the idea of poetic justice, were not dominated by it; and since they were as familiar as any products of the contemporary spirit, the contrast between ancient and modern was ever present. The drama of oppression thus had a rival in the drama of obsession. While one expressed the view that human life was the concern of the Universal Good, the other saw human life in terms of the purely personal. This roundabout way of stating that Shakespeare's tragedies were being acted is chosen because the implications of such an obvious fact would otherwise be taken for granted. Shakespeare's infinite variety had been reduced to order by stock companies, and that order was imposed on playwrights of past, present, and immediate future. Each play had parts for the leading lady and leading gentleman. This was simple in town but in the country they had to be prepared for a

*The Curfew*  
Drury Lane 1807

London star. If the visitor were an actor, then the leading gentleman became merely chief support, no great loss of dignity in *Othello* or *Romeo And Juliet* but a severe humiliation in *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*. If the visitor were an actress, then the leading lady had to be Gertrude instead of Ophelia, either Emilia or Bianca instead of Desdemona, and Lady Capulet instead of Juliet. Whoever was displaced in this manner displaced someone else just beneath according to a system which meant that an actor "who knew his business" had to have all Shakespeare, byplay as well as words, cemented in his mind. There were "Juvenile Leads", male and female; First Heavy Gentleman, Leading Character-parts (polite way of saying First Heavy Lady), Second Heavy Gentleman, Second Character-parts; First Comedians and Second Comedians, likewise of both weights and sexes; and so throughout every well-graded company down to "Walking On" and "General Utility". In the Green Room, says W. E. Holloway, an actor whose link with old stage traditions is unique, this hierarchy was observed more strictly still. Two thrones testified to the supremacy of leading lady and leading gentleman, to whom none might

peak unless spoken to; either the lady or the gentleman abdicated when the theatre was visited and then all on the distaff or all on the spear side, according to the sex of the star from town, moved down one in the line of flanking chairs. Players imposed a pattern upon plays which imposed it in turn upon novels as well, because all imagination took form and colour from the foot-lights when glamour was shed upon life by the play.

Of that "the book of the play" is a shrivelled relic to mislead hasty judgments. Take John Tobin's *The Curfew*, seen at Drury Lane in 1807, as an example. When read it is classed with *A Tale Of Mystery* and *Tekeli*. This is just your modern impudence, for it is in five acts and written in blank verse that echoes *Hamlet*; it has eleven characters, including a friar, besides robbers and vassals. The author had died three years before from consumption while on a voyage to the West Indies: like so many plays by invalids, parsons, secret drinkers, dilettanti, reserved matrons, and others of retiring dispositions, it is a drama of violent emotions. Baron de Tracy, after confessing to "foul deeds as horrible as mine" on his knees before his lost wife's portrait, reproaches his daughter for having "declin'd upon a peasant slave". She dons male attire for an elopement and is carried off by robbers to their cave. Robert the good robber is her unknown brother. In "A chapel in the midst of which appears a tomb", an old witch pops out to thwart the villain, who cries in blank verse:

Foil'd at last!  
And by a woman!

That old witch, who has lived near the castle in a cottage, comes face to face with the Baron who cries, "The look, the voice—yes, yes; thou art my wife!"

The Gothic drama's first attempt to be human, hailed as a novelty, was founded on fact. A deaf-and-dumb waif in Paris, placed in the care of the Abbé de l'Épée who was famous for his powers of educating deaf mutes, proved to be the Comte de Salor. Bouilly turned the story into a five-act drama which was staged at the Théâtre Français in 1800. Kotzebue wrote a German version which was translated into *Deaf And Dumb; or, The Orphan*

*Protected*, by Thomas Holcroft. The "Abbé Del Épée" was impersonated at Drury Lane in 1801 by Kemble with Miss De Camp (whose beauty had moved him to violence in her dressing-room and to a public apology afterwards) as the young male mute with but this one friend. Their first scene together is mélodrame in style:

(Theodore *now sees The Palace of Harancour*: he starts—rivets his eyes to it—advances a step or two—points to the statues—with a shriek—and drops breathless into the arms of Del Épée.)

*Del É*: Ah my poor wronged boy,—for such I am sure you are—that sound goes to my very heart!—He scarcely breathes—I never saw him so much agitated—There, there;—Come, come—Why was a voice denied to sensibility so eloquent!

(Theodore *makes signs with the utmost rapidity, that he was born in that Palace, —that he lived in it when a child—had seen the statues—come through the gate, etc., etc.*)

*Del É*: Yes;—in that house he was born. Words could not tell it more plainly. —The care of Heaven still works upon the helpless.

(Theodore *makes signs of gratitude to Del Épée, and fervently kisses his hand—Del Épée explains that it is not to him, but Heaven, that he ought to pay his thanks—Theodore instantly drops on his knees, and expresses a prayer for blessings on his benefactor.*)

Merely to restore the youth to his home, by bringing him face to face with friends who recognize him and foes who confess how they caused him to disappear, a cast of fourteen fulfilled their regulation rôles amid frequent changes of scene and an entire absence of verisimilitude.

The story was founded on fact. Real life, in the way we describe as "truth imitating fiction", had borrowed a Gothic incident. For all that, the result is notable (at least in a history devoted, not to dramatic literature, but to plays that belong to the social panorama) simply because its hero's name stood for practical instead of abstract virtue. *Deaf And Dumb* hints at the coming change which would show some concern not so much over the plight of babes drawn from the wood or bottled in château, as starved in work-house or maimed in factory. Contrast Bouilly's drama, as play-goers did if we can trust the prologue, with conventional fictions.

*Deaf And Dumb; or, The Orphan Protected*

Drury Lane 1801

They are the wares of balladmongers and chapbook-pedlars distended, elaborated, and moralized; whatever their form they are still the children's tales of Robin Hood, Blue Beard, and Cinderella at heart. All retain old familiar faces; among them the Abbé's alone is new.

That there were no immediate attempts to copy this play may be interpreted as lack of sympathy for the helpless child. But if playwrights were unaware of its appeal, theatre managers were not. Audiences looked with moist eyes upon infant prodigies whose gifts (so it was fervently believed) doomed them to an early death. Pathetic ballads sung by children would overwhelm all playgoers. Hitherto very young performers were accepted as a matter of course in the same way that very young workers were accepted in the shops of butchers or bakers: people did take to their trades early in life. From now on the difference would be that juvenile efforts on the stage would win tears instead of smiles. The sentimental concern for them expressed itself when Master Smalley sang about a hapless cabin-boy in *Mother Goose*. Report told how this little schoolboy had been "rescued from obscurity".

## ACT VII. SCENE II

*Stage endeavours to end slavery*

HOW powerfully the stage sways (or used to sway) public sympathy is plain in the history of the slave trade. It would be plainer still if so much less than justice had been done to the writings of Aphra Behn. Moralists who raged against wits of Charles II's court dropped double-distilled venom on one who was a woman: the carver of her tombstone in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey, which says she was not proof against mortality, might truthfully have omitted the first "t". Among her plays, poems and novels is the history of a Royal Slave which roused indignation against the slave trade from generation to generation. Her childhood had been spent in the West Indies and she published her novel in 1658 as a record of fact. The interest it excited continued after her death, and in 1696 it was turned into the play of *Oroonoko* which was acted regularly. When its comic relief gave increasing offence on moral grounds, three unoffending versions prolonged its life to the end of the eighteenth century.

Another anti-slavery story thrived during the same period. According to the eleventh number of "The Spectator" it was first told in "Ligon's Account of Barbadoes". Under the title of "Inkle and Yarico" it became as familiar as a legend. Mr Thomas Inkle, brought up on "business first" principles, gets lost on a trading expedition and is brought to safety by Yarico, princess of the Amazon. When they reach Barbadoes he puts her up for sale; she begs for mercy because she is about to bear him a child, but he makes use of the information to rise in his demands upon the purchaser. George Colman's musical version at the Haymarket in 1787 does him credit. There is a happy ending only when Inkle has, after declaring "We Christians hunt money", pointed the moral that profit-making inclines men to evil. The piece was regularly revived during the next thirty years.

The negro became more popular than ever when Charles Dibdin appeared as Mungo in a musical trifle called *The Padlock*. One of the pantomimes which served as commentaries on passing whims transformed Mungo into Harlequin in 1789. Parliament, after arguing about the thousands of blacks transported to slavery in fleets of British ships, did nothing in particular nor did it very well. France abolished the trade in 1794 and the event was at once celebrated on the Paris stage by a new version of *Paul Et Virginie*. There had been a musical spectacle with this title at the Opéra-Comique in 1791. Now the Théâtre Feydeau presented *Paulin Et Virginie*, in which the children save a negress from slavery and are rewarded when Virginie is taken from the ship which bears her away from Paulin, by black rescuers. In 1794 the Ambigu staged *Adonis; ou, Le Bon Nègre* with a hero who rescues his master from the black insurgents in St. Dominique.

Foreign slave-owners were the villains in *Paul And Virginia* by James Cobb, a musical entertainment of 1800, and the heroes were negroes, one of whom says, "I am no slave, for I have British blood in my veins. I am told my father was an English sailor, who, being above vulgar prejudices, admired a black beauty". Another, a runaway slave, saves Virginia from shipwreck after her abduction. An English planter utters the boast that melodrama would echo and re-echo down the years, "From the moment a slave imprints his footstep on our shore—the moment he breathes the air of the land of freedom—he becomes free". But Pitt, scared of following the Republic, evaded the Society for the Suppression of the Slave Trade and slaves could still be the cargo of British ships. It was not until 1806 that the question was introduced by members of the Cabinet. Before abolition became law Drury Lane urged the Commons to their duty in its Christmas pantomime, *Furibond; or, Harlequin Negro*. The hero was shown in a transparency "relieving distressed objects". A negro begged the Fairy Benigna for the release of his fellow slaves, whereupon Britannia descended with her lion from the flies while the chorus sang:

She bears just England's blest decree  
That stamps the Negro's liberty.



Astonishment is felt now that those who freed the slaves were equally zealous to enslave the free. As the eighteenth century ended there was some zeal to educate the children of the poor but no concern over child labour. Why did public sympathy with the negro overwhelm all pity for helpless victims of the new industrialism or for infants tortured by any form of hardship? Unconscious propaganda gives the answer. When Rousseau developed his theory of original sinlessness he might have drawn examples from childish innocence if he had been a lover of children, but as he found them unbearable he turned instead to visions of philosophic Hottentots living in kraals serene and loftily declining all bribes of a life of luxury in Europe. The man of feeling had no sentiments to spare for children, and when the ballad of the babes in the wood was dramatized, the good robber stole the play. Thus *Deaf And Dumb* marked a humane broadening of the public conscience however much of its appeal was based on the victim's right, like Oroonoko's, to riches through his noble birth. Man is near-sighted. Wrongs have to be brought under his million noses before he can act like one human being and right them. This is, partly, what the drama of oppression did—often and deliberately, even though at other times its sole aim was to titivate righteous indignation for the sake of amusement.

Meanwhile the cause of all adult slaves was still ardently espoused by melodrama. The negro was championed afresh at Covent Garden in 1818 by Thomas Morton's *The Slave*, with Macready—John Philip Kemble's spiritual heir—as Gambia. The dialogue, though in the "Amazement" vein, expresses the sentiments of democracy. The villain cries, "African, thy virtues have subdued me", to which Gambia answers, "To be so vanquished is man's proudest victory". When sent to England the negro says, "What land, that poet ever sung, or enchanter swayed, can equal that which, when the slave's foot touches, he becomes free!" In 1822, Covent Garden presented *The Two Galley Slaves*, by John Howard Payne from the French, with T. P. Cooke as Henry, scourge of robbers. When he is wounded in a fight, a galley mark is seen on his arm. He is innocent; he suffered for his brother, "his despairing wife, and helpless little ones". In 1828 Covent Garden

turned to Russia in *The Serf*, by R. Talbot, announced as from "Isidor and Olga" by Professor Rampach. Vladimir has a half-brother, Isidor, whose mother was a slave. Both love Olga; Vladimir makes Isidor a slave and demands her hand as the price of his freedom. The brothers kill each other in a duel.

Jews were also under the protection of the drama of oppression. Religious tolerance inspired the playwrights of the people more strongly than the dramatic versifiers who wanted to tread in Shakespeare's footsteps. At Drury Lane in the May of 1819 there was a great fuss over Milner's popular melodrama of *The Jew Of Lubeck; or, The Heart Of A Father* with its tale of paternal forbearance towards an excessively prodigal son.

ACT VII. SCENE III

*Sawdust battles for freedom*

PUBLIC joy in bestowing the blessing of freedom upon the oppressed was particularly gratified by sawdust battles. The Napoleonic Wars had given a highly specialized significance to any armed conflict. Smells evoke frames of mind and a whiff of gunpowder could do this powerfully. On Paris crowds the effect might differ from year to year according to politics, but to the London mob it could have but one meaning—the fight for freedom that ended in virtue triumphant. "Grand military and equestrian spectacles" were, before a sentiment was uttered, strictly in the nature of ceremonial to the glory of widespread liberation. The drama went in for freedom as a retail trade. The circus dealt in it wholesale. The more noise, the more smoke, the more coloured lights, the more commotion, the greater the panacea for universal ills. There is a hint of this in the words of the Terrible Fitzball when he vindicates Bengal fire, "of which I have been accused of being the inventor", the much-reviled blue fire. With evangelical warmth he preaches, "The merits of this

fine scientific chemical preparation, at which the ignorant smile, are not simply applied to effects on the stage, but are used in the greatest emergencies, as signals at sea, especially during fogs, and have saved not only men's valuable lives, but many vessels from destruction. Blue-fire is a discovery well qualified in the pages of humanity".

The unspoken thought here is that entertainment does not exist for its own sake. To be "well qualified in the pages of humanity" should be the aim of every performance that hopes to rank higher in ethical pretensions than the amoral Punch and Judy show. Ever since the turn of the eighteenth century when pagan gods and goddesses were driven out of song-and-dance entertainments, the conviction had grown that amusement must uphold moral principles in word and deed. The more popular it was, the more virtuous it must be; and in this audiences thoroughly concurred. The crowning glory of shows, mighty shows, was the climactic utterance of good or noble thoughts. *El Hyder, The Chief Of The Ghaut Mountains*, by William Barrymore, is typical. A midshipman, mixed up in a war between rival chieftains in India, with horses, a splendidly caparisoned elephant, black slaves, banners, and artillery, says, "We British lads espouse the cause of all who are oppressed. Each true-born Briton echoes forth the cry of freedom; and while a sword, a man or guinea lasts, surrounding natives shall allow that England is the first to combat in the cause of liberty".

This is the voice of the "Surreyside", more particularly Astley's, the circus at the bend of the road on the south side of Westminster Bridge. "Most English of theatres" it was called, and yet it took its tone, even at its zenith, from the Napoleonic dramas of Paris. During the time of Philip Astley and his son its triumphs had been Gothic. *The Blood-Red Knight*, the talk of the town in 1810, elaborated the old captives-in-castle formula by sinking the middle of the stage and throwing over it a "Devil's bridge" where riders in armour fought in the glare of the final conflagration. But Paris had, two years earlier, turned from the ancient to the modern. In *Le Passage Du Mont-Saint-Bernard*, at the Porte-Saint-Martin, the actor who impersonated Napoleon

excited the interest of Napoleon himself. In a box too hastily prepared, so Ginisty tells in "Le Mélodrame", the Emperor brushed against forgotten paint-pots, covered himself with well-meant glory, flew into a rage and banned the whole production.

Napoleon's victories were celebrated in the circuses of two cities for half a century to come. All the triumphs stage battles had previously won were forgotten when *The Battle Of Waterloo* was refought in sawdust some eight years after it had been fought in blood. It marked the arrival at Astley's of a new showman, Andrew Ducrow, perhaps the greatest master of garish spectacle the world has ever seen, and enabled Gomersal to give the performance which forced Colonel Newcome to declare that he "was amazed—amazed, by Jove, Sir—at the prodigious likeness of the principal actor to the Emperor Napoleon". Modern minds will be amazed—amazed, by Jove, Sir—at the prodigious unlikeness of the principal part to the Emperor Napoleon. Although the ravaged peasantry speak of themselves as the oppressed and the French soldiery as the oppressors, he is, though "no orator", a noble soul who disdains death while waging a defensive war to defend "the unpolluted liberty of his native country".

Wellington, inspired by "true English pride", has no virtuous utterances. But Napoleon, when Corporal Standfast is captured, says, "He is wounded and a prisoner, therefore no more an enemy", before asking him to accept a cross—"I bear a few about me"—for withholding information. As Wellington had disappointed melodramatists (as well as democrats), noble sentiments could not be put into the mouth of the victor. Since it was too good a battle to be kept off the stage, they had to be put into the mouth of the vanquished. The idea of letting Waterloo be fought and won without any virtue at all was unthinkable, although the stage directions in Duncombe's Edition are so full as to prove that the engagements of horse, foot, and artillery were worth seeing for their own sake. The "Devil's Bridge" is hotly contested at Marchienne, and at Quatre Bras a French officer "orders a regular fire to be kept upon the Highlanders among the corn, who are rapidly thinn'd; at the same time a party of English horse charge from the same side as the French entered, and en-

deavour to force the wood by performing a circular movement". The wood, taken and retaken until Blücher's artillery played upon it, was probably in the ring, while the cornfield was on the stage. Even so, and even supposing that each force numbered half-a-dozen "auxiliaries" (as "supers" were called here) at most, this is one of the most complicated of all stage battles. The grand climax at Mont St. Jean, with burning baggage, affrighted horses, shells, "screams, shrieks and the double crash", could surpass it only in noise, glare, and smell.

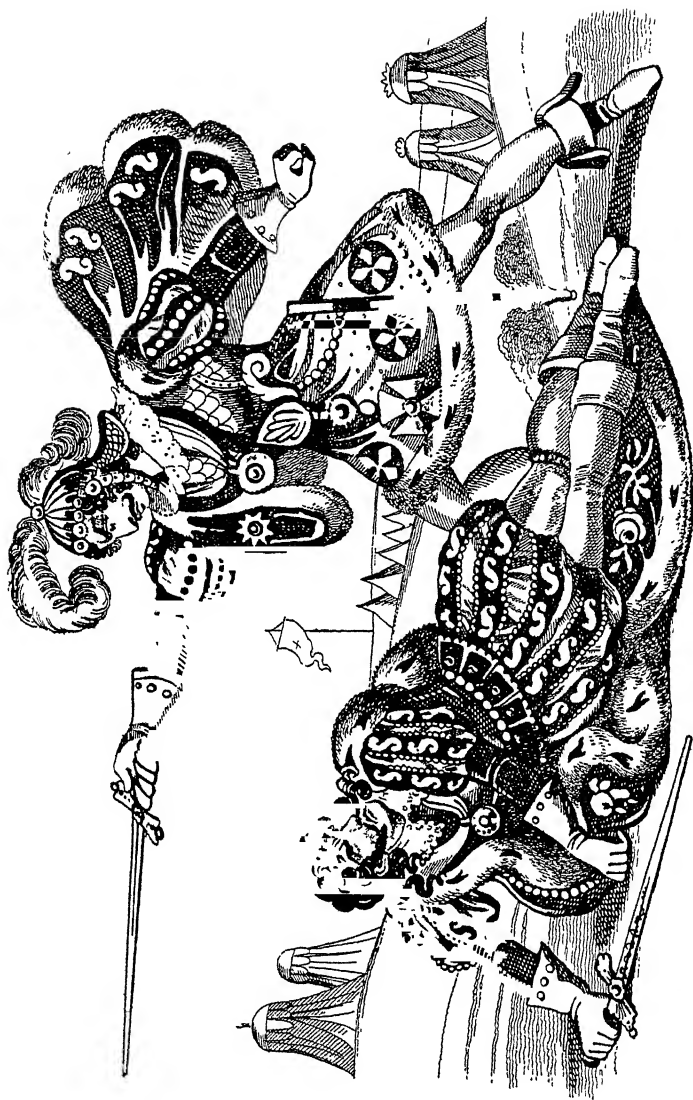
Considering the success of sea spectacles, from the time when Nelson's victories were refought in miniature on a tank at Sadler's Wells filled from the New River, naval history had a surprisingly short innings on the stage compared with military history. Fitzball's *Nelson* told, at the Adelphi in 1827, how Jack Sykes, Nelson's "favourite coxswain", eloped with a Jewish usurer's daughter; one act ended with the attack on Santa Cruz and the other with Nelson's death at Trafalgar on the quarter-deck (stage licence) of the Victory. C. Z. Barnett's *The Loss Of The Royal George; or, The Fatal Land Breeze*, at Sadler's Wells in 1840, exhibited female virtue in distress—prelude to a mimic catastrophe which bore out the title in the last scene: "The waters are seen violently agitated; and are raised about one-third above the level of the stage; they are transparent". The sunken vessel was "distinctly visible", while the sailors were swimming about in all directions. Scenic display sometimes got the upper hand. But not for long.

## ACT VIII. SCENE I

*The evil spirit in acting*

POPULAR imagination creates its new fashions out of old ideas. Changes in public entertainment from 1800 onwards produced no novelties. While true of both the demonic and the domestic styles, this is strongly evident in a third marked by the presence of the bugbear. You may see him in the demonic, for there monsters in superhuman shapes are given to crying "Ha, ha" with the joy of evil-doing, and in early nineteenth-century fiction your demon is your only eager evil-doer, for its human villains are maudlin. They did not become exultant until actors had exhibited Shylock, Iago, and Richard III as fiends incarnate, and in this way the theatre outstripped other imaginative forces in reflecting what was happening in the great world far beyond playhouse walls. Consider the power of that spiritual tornado which raised Buonaparte aloft amid the ruins of many ideals. Blast from that threw John Philip Kemble from his impressive pedestal. Not so very many years later figures rather less noble, Young and Macready, would clamber upon it, but for the present it would stay unoccupied while public favour went to two overwrought drunkards, frustrated overlong. One was George Frederick Cooke. In 1800, when he was forty years of age and could cause Byron to marvel that a man should live so long drunk, his delight in devilry overthrew the high Roman fashion at Covent Garden.

Then came Edmund Kean, whom genius devoured like a fire. "His fame", wrote Hazlitt during his first season at Drury Lane, "shall last as long as the heart of man shall beat in response to the call of nature." Genius was his doom. Read that harrowing story of the "love" child's hungry, tortured infancy and you will see Destiny standing over him in the shape of the posture-master who



*Mr Kean as Richard III*

*Mr Cooper as Richmond*

stretched his limbs until he had to wear irons for support. Food and shelter he had often to go without from his babyhood when he was left in a doorway. Yet no pampered amateur of the stage ever bought a finer training. No wonder he was a swordsman—Angelo was his fencing-master. No wonder he could dance—D'Egville saw to that. The orphan had the whole theatre for his guardian. As a child he played Arthur to the King John of Kemble and the Constance of Siddons; yet, despite his early acquaintance with the great ones of London, he was a strolling player, tramping hundreds of miles, carrying his dying child in his arms, leading his wife when she was expecting another baby, starving, raging, year after year.

To what end? So that when at last his golden hour arrived he could burst upon the astounded players of Drury Lane like a blazing comet no astronomer had foretold. Shylock he would play, no matter what the committee had decided, and in his own style, no matter how sternly the stage manager might say at the one rehearsal, "It will never do". He dined that night. He acted so masterfully before a small audience that a player marvelled "how the devil so few of them kicked up such a row". For barely twelve years he was the wonder of the land. The miserable scandal over an alderman's wife led to proceedings for "crim. con.", with judgment against him for heavy damages. That added to public hostility at a time when there was already anger against his bad faith. There had been an estrangement between himself and his wife and son. At last they were reconciled and Charles Kean was engaged to play Iago to his father's Othello at Covent Garden in the March of 1833. Half-way through this performance Edmund Kean sank into his son's arms, whispering, "I am dying—speak to them for me". During the night of May 14 he seemed to be acting his parts over again while insensible. "Give me another horse", he gasped shortly before he died.

By-play was one of his greatest excellences. He relied less on his voice, so harsh that at times it "creaked", than on the expression of the countenance. These criticisms reveal the technical novelty of his acting. In spirit the change was still greater. While Kemble was "the statue on the pedestal that cannot come down without



*Edmund Kean as Richard III*

danger of shaming its worshippers", Kean was "a little ill-looking vagabond". While Kemble was but ridiculed and shouted at during riots, Kean was lampooned, disgraced, reviled, outlawed. Kean's acting was described as not of the patrician order; he was "one of the people, and what might be termed a *radical* performer". These were contemporary comments. At this distance of time a more vital difference between the two actors becomes plain. That Kemble excelled in nobility and virtue was evident in all his favourite parts from Hamlet and Coriolanus to Earl Percy and Rolla. Kean failed when he tried to assume such qualities, or

when he essayed suffering innocence; he succeeded where Kemble failed—*The Iron Chest*, for example. There had to be a touch of the malign, of murderous frenzy to inspire him. His *Lear* caused very considerable disappointment. As *Romeo* he stood beneath Juliet's balcony like a lump of lead. His *Hamlet*, "no sweet prince", showed a severity amounting to virulence. Abel Drugger, Garrick's favourite comic part, he played but three times. As for polished comedy, he would have none of it. When offered the part of Joseph Surface, he returned it "with the just indignation of insulted talent".

Mild villainy made no appeal to him. He had caused the vast, half-empty auditorium of Drury Lane to vibrate with the shouts of those who saw Shylock as a swarthy fiend with a huge butcher's knife in his grasp and blood-lust in his eyes. Richard Crookback and *Iago* were his finest performances; his magnificent *Othello* was "too often in the highest key of passion, too uniformly on the verge of extravagance, too constantly on the rack". As *Macbeth* he was heart-rending: on coming to himself after the murder, his voice clung to his throat at the sight of his bloody hands. Out of two plays by Shakespeare's contemporaries he created masterpieces—Sir Giles Overreach, with his ruthless frenzy of miserliness in Massinger's *A New Way To Pay Old Debts*, and that barbarous fiend, Barrabas, in Marlowe's *The Jew Of Malta*.

Yet another he found in Young's *The Revenge*, a failure when first brought out at Drury Lane in 1721. In *Zanga*, the chief character, *Othello* and *Iago* are so combined as to create a raging thirst for blood. "The very vices of Mr Kean's general acting might almost be said to assist him in the part", Hazlitt wrote. Like a restless panther, in his hurried motions, wily caution, cruel eye, quivering visage and violent gestures, he had "all the wild impetuosity of barbarous revenge, the glowing energy of the untamed children of the sun, whose blood drinks up the radiance of fiercer skies". What Kean signified in himself, and still more in the immediate response won from his own generation, was the Napoleon of the theatrical revolution. Audiences were no longer content to contemplate nobility and virtue. There was glory for

them in his violence. All his achievements might be summed up in one word—crime. Virtue would still be rewarded on the stage and vice punished, but the criminal had ceased to be as lugubrious as those old favourites of moral lessons before the footlights—Jane Shore and George Barnwell. Ferocity held playgoers spellbound. Criminals had always held the stage, but not until the nineteenth century was crime itself invested with glamour. The murderer became exultant instead of maudlin. Kean had triumphed over Byron. The evil-doer might no longer ask for sympathy. He demanded fearful admiration instead.

## ACT VIII. SCENE II

*Highwaymen and pirates*

**E**VEN with the popularity of Kean's ecstatic evil before their eyes, authors were reluctant to portray unmitigated villainy. Evil-doers who repented of their sins and seducers who were in the end only too glad to marry the girl were the vogue. So much care was taken not to malign human nature by presenting it as other than unfailingly virtuous at heart that when moral degradation had to be brought into a story it was represented as a visitation direct from the nether world. Demons, vampires and hobgoblins of land or sea committed crimes too awful for human agency. Man, presumably, was deemed incapable of such horrors. Perhaps some pious bias against the death scene of a human being with all his sins upon him may be read into the regularity of repentance of melodrama then. But it went further than a desire to behold the sinner that repenteth. At times this reluctance to disbelieve in the essential goodness of man left melodramas without a villain. That was the result of "moralizing the stage". When the old unregenerate spirit had found its swan song in *The Beggar's Opera*, even Gay's friends could not praise it for its lack of unctuous virtue. Swift commended it for

the excellence of its morality as a piece that, "by a turn of humour entirely new, placed all kinds of vice in the strangest and most odious light". Dr Herring, afterwards Archbishop of Canterbury, censured it as giving encouragement not only to vice but to crimes by making a highwayman the hero and dismissing him at last unpunished. It was believed that "After the exhibition of *The Beggar's Opera* the gangs of robbers were evidently multiplied". A magistrate requested Covent Garden not to revive a piece of such immoral tendency. The manager's reply was that it would be withdrawn when the magistrate suppressed certain practices in his vicinity. It continued to be enjoyed. Enjoyment continued to need moral justification.

No wonder the Gothic villain's heart was never in his work. Scott's villains also lack stomach for it. The more infamous they are the more they become targets for the arrows of the virtuous. The intentions of Sir Briand towards Rebecca and of Front-de-bœuf towards Rowena seem both honourable and respectful in their strictly moderated violence. This may be a false view caused by the sharp bend in the passage of time. But surely the bucks and rakes of the Regency, fully active when the *Waverley Novels* were being written, were not so sedately formal when offering violence to the objects of their passion. Scott's historical villains discharge their heavy responsibility towards the plot so conscientiously that as they retire discomfited they seem to sigh with relief that the disagreeable task is over. Between these and the kilted law-breakers there was all the difference in the world. Not having to force unwelcome (though strictly honourable) attentions upon any lady the reivers did not labour under the deep sense of their author's displeasure. The home life of Rob Roy was such that he could look the whole world in the face; and so could, and did, his wife. There was a wholesomeness about his career which put crime (in fiction) on a new footing. Romance with its dependence on sex in some shape or form gave place to Adventure. This, especially in a Highland setting, was entertainment in itself; with some appeal against oppression added, the glamour of Roderick Dhu (played by T. P. Cooke at the Surrey) and Rob Roy became so strongly felt that fictitious morals could

henceforth always override fact. Now it was the turn of other reivers. William Barrymore wrote for the Coburg in 1822 *Gilderoy; or, The Bonnie Boy*, whose hero owed his proverbial fame to the height at which he was hanged. Both this and

He never wore a Highland plaid  
But costly silken cloathes

were ignored; also the unpleasant truth that Perthshire rose *en masse* to win the £1,000 for his capture. On the stage he swears by his dirk that the richest booty would lose its value "were I deprived of the happiness of sharing it with the necessitous". Jessy Logan becomes his wife in return for the rescue from the Tolbooth of her father, Royalist conspirator against Cromwell. That prompts the big scene of domestic drama; when she confesses her "link with crime" a parent's malediction falls upon her. Logan, recaptured, is held to ransom for seven thousand crowns. Gilderoy pays by giving himself up for the ten thousand crowns that are upon his head, then winds his horn for his followers to release them both.

Much of the credit for romanticizing criminals must go to William Barrymore. It was he who first saw the possibilities of Turpin as a popular hero. In a circus spectacle which he devised for Astley's in 1819, the ride to York on Black Bess was represented for public admiration. To meet this demand for a spice of devilry Pierce Egan's "Life in London; or, The Day and Night Scene of Jerry Hawthorn and his Elegant Friend, Corinthian Tom" was published in monthly parts with lively illustrations by George Cruikshank. The first instalment appeared in July 1821. A rival "Real Life in London" was immediately announced. In the autumn Barrymore got up *Life In London* for Astley's, Charles Isaac Mungo Dibdin another for the Olympic, and Moncrieff a third for the Adelphi. Pierce Egan had already begun his own stage version, accepted by Sadler's Wells for the following spring. All of this was but the beginning of half a century of publications and performances, revivals, sequels, imitations and plagiarisms, all exhibiting the underworld as a pleasure resort. Protests that vice was being exhibited were opposed by play-

goers, including the Lord Chamberlain, who found very good entertainment in scenes of thieves' kitchens. Yet behind this frolic there was an army of grim spectres to warrant the protests. One-fifteenth part of the population, it was calculated half-way through the nineteenth century, lived by crime. Obviously authors who made any pretence of observing the life around them would no longer be able to ignore the criminal who followed his infamous profession (in Victorian phraseology) with wonderful vigour and success. Tales of adventure would be sent to join the eighteenth-century elegant's fairy-stories in the nursery. Both were suitable reading for the young—which indicates what frame of mind the public was in when they were voraciously read by adults. Pierce Egan deserves some credit for bringing, no matter how frivolously, the down-and-outs before the footlights.

Neither Claude Duval, hanged at Tyburn in 1670 to the great grief of the women, nor Macheath, Gay's unblushing rascal, is responsible for the severe outbreak of highwaymen on the stage in the nineteenth century. Nor was the real Jack Sheppard, hanged at Tyburn in 1724, nor his stage appearance shortly afterwards, nor the Richard Turpin hanged at York in 1739. None of these can be blamed for getting himself seriously involved in mixed morals. That ancient whitewash "robbing the rich to feed the poor" does not come into it because it upheld the robber as virtuous because of his robberies. The Victorian idea was that he was virtuous despite his robberies, and what started this avalanche was "Paul Clifford" by Lord Lytton, whose fate as a major influence in popular fiction would have shocked, could it have been foreseen, an author so much in earnest and so highly esteemed in his lifetime. His mother, "an intellectual and accomplished, as well as an opulent and many-acred widow", resumed in 1811, by royal licence, her maiden name of Lytton. Edward Lytton, born 1805, wrote "Ismael, an Oriental Tale" in 1820. While at Cambridge he made vacation rambles on foot "through the length and breadth of England and Scotland" to enlarge his knowledge of his fellow countrymen. He wrote his highwayman novel of "Paul Clifford" in 1830 to show the social effect of circumstances on crime, and his next novel, which was on the subject of Eugene

Aram, the murderer who had taught in the family of the author's grandfather, also had high purpose. In 1831 Lytton began a political career of some note. His speech on negro apprenticeship hastened the "complete emancipation delayed by the Act of Liberation". In 1834 he wrote "The Last Days of Pompeii" and put in a good word for villainy with the sentiment, "All of us are human, and Arbaces, criminal as he was, had his share of our common feelings and our mother clay". Three years later Lytton refused a place in the Government and accepted a baronetcy. His play *The Lady Of Lyons* became a classic. His novel "Night and Morning" was soon forgotten, although it may be regarded as the earliest detective story in the English language. There is some hint of a parallel with Lytton's career in that of Harrison Ainsworth who began "Rookwood", his novel of Dick Turpin, in 1831 and published it in 1834 anonymously. He had written in 1826, "Considerations as to the best means of affording immediate relief to the Operative Classes in the manufacturing districts".

From two such brains came the impulse that dominated the turbulent mass of penny dreadfuls for many years to come. They romanticized crime, more particularly highway robbery by masked riders who held up mail-coaches, and this was ever the favourite subject in periodical publications devoted to blood and thunder. What they did for the landshark, Fenimore Cooper had already done for the salt-water thief. Out of his experiences as a midshipman in the United States Navy he wrote novels of the sea that rivalled even "The Last of the Mohicans". When he came to Europe in 1826 he wrote "The Red Rover", with a pirate as the central figure. Blackbeard was a mere blackguard. His place was now taken by a villain who could abduct gentlewomen with an honourable, if not chivalrous, air and go down to the angry deep in the ship he loved with rather more than the halo of a martyr.

## ACT VIII. SCENE III

*Tug-o'-war for the villain's soul*

ELOQUENT though unconscious testimony is paid to Kean in many plays written towards the end of his career. Dibdin, Fitzball, Buckstone, Pocock, Peake and Arnold were all swayed by him. Unrepentance creeps into the domestic drama, changing weak victims of circumstance—murderers who murder out of weakness of character, not diabolically strong resolve—into living proofs of the validity of the doctrine of original sin. But the process was exasperatingly slow. There was to be a long tug-o'-war for the criminal's soul. Scott, Lytton, Ainsworth and Cooper all exerted themselves to prove he was not so bad after all, a gentleman at heart, a chivalrous benefactor to the poor and needy; in fact, a hero merely pretending to be a rascal. They had to pull in a tussle without end against a team of hacks (like Egan) who reported "dreadful confessions of horrid murders" by real criminals. Whether the criminal should be hero or villain was not the dividing-line; nor was it whether an evil-doer should be so placed as to command sympathy; nor was it the struggle of romance versus reality. All these questions could be answered one way or the other by either side. The dispute was strictly whether in a universe ruled by virtue triumphant there could exist such an insubordinate ill as crime exultant.

The stage, pulled from one side to the other, still held now and then to the decayed Gothic tradition that villainy was a frenzy in the blood, for by now it was well established that no explanation need be forthcoming when a stage murder was committed. This appears in a Drury Lane piece of 1825, *The Shepherd Of Derwent Vale*; or, *The Innocent Culprit*, by Joseph Lunn, which was adorned with real sheep. Sir Wilfred Wayward, for no known reason, hires an assassin to kill his younger brother aged three. Twenty years pass. An old soldier, with the assassin's written confession, comes to the village and is murdered by Sir Wilfred,



who persuades Shock, the shepherd, to confess to the crime. When this innocent culprit is about to be led off to immediate execution, the written confession is found, proving him to be the long-lost brother. Sir Wilfred confesses and throws himself headlong into a torrent.

Crime exultant gets a hearing in two dramatizations by Tom Dibdin. *Suil Dhuv The Coiner*, from "Tales of the Munster Festivals", was staged at Sadler's Wells in 1827. Soldiers level their muskets at Suil Dhuv as he leaps from a rock into the lake below and, rising above the surface, cries, "Fire! Ha, ha, ha!" while exhibiting a nose that might, judging by its bold contour and brilliant hue, have itself been coined. Dibdin followed this two years later with *The Banks Of The Hudson; or, The Congress Trooper* for the Coburg. During the War of Independence a farmer, resolved to remain neutral, entertains a British officer. When the American forces advance, both are condemned to be shot as spies by Captain Dobson. To the farmer he cries, "Thou stubborn knave! Where is thy cockatrice of a son? Tell me, or, by the infernal powers, I will still try the effect of fire and save your neck, by burning you alive". In thunder and rain a fire is lit on flagstones. The British arrive. Dobson, wounded, staggers off. The exterior of the mansion is seen in flames. The roof falls in with a dreadful crash, "overwhelming the wretched Dobson".

Such attempts to blacken villains could not drive the soulful criminal from the scene. His zenith was marked by Fitzball's *The Red Rover; or, The Tiger Of The Seas*, brought out at the Adelphi in 1828. The gentle pirate may lure gentlewomen aboard but he treats them most politely, while the lieutenant who voluntarily keeps them company feels in honour bound to turn pirate (in a way which reminds the modern playgoer of *The Pirates Of Penzance*) to such an extent that when a man-o'-war is sighted he will not signal because this "may appear too much like confirmation of the base character I already bear aboard this ship". On the other hand, when the pirates, angry with their betrayer, slew a gun round at him the Rover shouts, "Hell-hounds!—fiends—spare the women. Now, ladies, away—away to the jolly-boat. Miscreants! They have slain me". The Dolphin burns. "Mast,

*The Brigand*

Drury Lane 1829

rigging and crew, all sink with the vessel. The Red Rover is seen combating the waves and at last meets his fate", watched by the ladies aboard the man-o'-war.

This outlaw of the sea is yet another variant of the type that always dominates Anglo-Saxon popular fiction. Robin Hood had so snugly occupied the imagination of the race that all rascals would be regarded sentimentally, and even Macheath, as frank as any, would be called not thief but gentleman of the road. The public was ready to look at spectacles of crime and shudder. What they were shown instead was the old chap-book romance over which they laughed and cried. *The Brigand*, adapted from the French by Planché for Drury Lane in 1829, was Robin Hood in Calabrian tableaux to represent Eastlake's pictures, "An Italian Brigand Chief Reposing" and "The Wife of a Brigand Chief watching the result of a Battle". Massaroni is gambling with the invisible St. Eustace, who is winning, and the amount is forced upon a steward who passes by; when the steward returns he has to pay the saint's losses. Such playful high spirits lead to a sad ending. Massaroni, for another frolic, attends the prince's party, is shot at, mortally wounded and then discovered to be the prince's long-lost son. Why should he have to emulate the Man of Feeling

and die? What in the name of poetic justice has doomed him? Retribution it cannot be, for none of his deeds offends the higher laws, nor expiation, because his virtues are many and his vices negligible. Though better fitted to pass his life in comic opera and end with song and dance, he has been caught by this tidal wave of crime and punishment. Masses of children who had been told, "You have been naughty and you must be punished for it", had grown up in the belief that it was the law of Nature, and all the pranks of a Regency buck could but confirm them in it. These law-abiding playgoers liked to see lawless players die, and playwrights had begun to realize it. A. L. V. Campbell, who played Sui Dhuu at Sadler's Well's, conceived a bolder villain for that house, though not for himself to impersonate. His part was the sheer hulk, through poverty-stricken old age, after whom the piece was called *Tom Bowling* in 1830. Dare-Devil Bill, the smuggler, is the villain. When landed in jail by the treachery of Snapfee, the lawyer, he cries, "He shall hang! hang! hang! and on the same gibbet as myself! And how I will exult, and how my eyeballs, starting from their sockets, will glare upon him in their convulsive brilliancy! And I will laugh, too . . . ha, ha, ha!" But the sight of Lucy Bowling makes him cry, for when she was a very little girl he was an honest lad. "Music—he appears choked by emotion, and sobbing, gradually falls on his knees."

In the first nautical plays, pirates were, like lawyers and landlords, mere foils for the Jolly Jack Tar; now they were the centre of interest—representing crime for crime's sake. The change was clearly marked in Buckstone's *The Wreck Ashore* at the Adelphi in 1830. Miles Bertram, squire of Moatley, murders his rival and joins the ship of his old friend Grampus, smuggler and pirate. Years later Grampus comes back to the marshes during a storm—a fugitive from his mutinous men—and peers through the window of the heroine's cottage. When she hears him outside the door and sees the catch lift, she loads a carbine and shouts a warning; there are heavy blows outside; she fires and a terrible figure, ragged and emaciated, falls through the doorway. Before he dies she hears that Bertram, now married to her sister, was the murderer. The pirates' revels in the squire's old home are inter-

rupted. Mules, mortally wounded, deliriously calls to his men to board, "Up with the black flag! Ha! Ha!", and dies. This is no old-fashioned stage pirate but a criminal deserving a last grimace near the footlamps.

## ACT VIII. SCENE IV

*From Maria Marten to J——k S———d*

MORE dying speeches by stage criminals coincided with fewer dying speeches by real criminals. Executions, free entertainment throughout the ages, became comparatively rare. London which had had about one a week up to 1820 was reduced by humanitarian changes in the law to none at all in 1835. Whenever there was a hanging, joyous crowds thronged the Old Bailey or Horsemonger Lane, but despite this evidence of undiminished popularity the spectacle did not play up to the public. Coiners used to be drawn to the scaffold on a sledge; the custom ended in 1827. Bodies when unnoosed had been dissected and left open to the view of long lines of sightseers; this was stopped in 1832. One of the consequences was widespread hysteria directly a murder was discovered. It first made itself evident in 1824 when Thurtell was tried at Hertford, and (more reasonably) the next year when Probert, his accomplice who turned King's Evidence, was hanged at the Old Bailey for horse-stealing. Forgers came frequently (until their list ended in 1829) and highwaymen were put to death either singly or in batches. When Burke's crime of smothering the living in order to sell them to anatomists was made known in Edinburgh in 1829, the excitement was natural enough. Bishop and Williams, convicted of imitating them in London after the body of an Italian boy had been found in a well, caused another reasonable outcry. Yet all these horrors held the public imagination less than a sordid story from Bury St. Edmunds in 1828, when a sub-normal young brute killed a young woman of weak character.

In the chronicles of capital punishment the words "for the murder of his paramour" or "for the murder of his concubine" are often recorded. Scores of such deeds have been forgotten. One, the killing of Maria Marten, mole-catcher's daughter, by William Corder in the Red Barn, Polstead, has become a legend. Puppets, peep-shows and balladmongers recognized it at once as matter for entertainment. Writers of condemned-men's confessions and full reports of trials came next, with illustrated histories published in sixpenny parts. Novelists elaborated the dry facts into penny dreadfuls and so the vengeful gypsy came into the story. Hacks at out-of-the-way theatres made Corder into the public's favourite villain though no playwright of any repute would notice the subject, with the result that no dramatized version of the murder in the Red Barn was published for a hundred years. The legend was kept alive on the stage, where the characters were altered to satisfy the public's wants. One glance at the murderer and his victim as they appear in the play is enough to convince us that the crime itself had not excited people as a glimpse of reality. From the police-court magistrate who called it a "romance" to the playwright and preacher who painted the whole scene red, everybody violently exaggerated to the other extreme. What is now called sex was then called sin; this was a sinful murder and as such was viewed not as evidence of what avaricious cunning can be displayed by weak minds but as the deed of a monster, kith and kin to Nero, far worse than any Suil Dhuv or Dare-Devil Bill. He had sinned. Therefore no theatre with a reputation to lose would let him be represented on its stage, while every theatre which did exhibit the murder in the Red Barn was packed. It is worth noting how sexless the crimes of melodrama at this period are. No wife-murders occur. No killers are illegitimate seducers. Even in fiction of classic times such a "criminal" as Lord Lytton's Arbaces has honourable intentions towards his victim. The corpse of Corder was the skeleton in melodrama's cupboard. Crime had to be kept clean.

Such strict observance was paid to this by Lord Lytton that in *Paul Clifford* the rest of society is not fit to lick the highwayman's top-boots. Law and order's chief representative in the

novel, an ambitious lawyer named William Brandon, in a fit of jealousy passes his wife off as his mistress in order to sell her to his friend and start life afresh with funds. The child thus branded as a bastard grows into Paul Clifford who is gazing one night into eyes that are, unknown to him, his cousin Lucy's, when he is arrested as a thief and convicted through William Brandon's prosecution. In prison Paul makes friends with gentlemen of the road, escapes with one of them, becomes their captain and leads a rollicking life, to the envy of all young bloods. He holds up the coach of Lord Mauleverer, one of His Majesty's Household, whose roving fancy, having brought Mrs Brandon to ruin in days gone by, now fastens on Lucy. Paul is cornered at last. After heroic resistance he is captured and has to be sentenced to death—by Sir William Brandon just as he learns that the prisoner is his son. Mauleverer, to atone for his youthful vices, obtains the King's pardon and the judge it is who dies.

Whatever chance it stood in the novel, the moral purpose was lost during the performance of Benjamin Webster's version at the Coburg in 1822. Brisk escapades set to *The Beggar's Opera* music, scenes of high life in the Bath of Beau Nash and low life in Bridewell, a coach with real horses and spirited conflicts were not likely to drive home Lord Lytton's views on sociology. What he intended to show was the power of environment in turning youth to evil ways. What he did show was a soul of virtue untarnished by its own misdeeds of robbery under arms. Crime had been rewarded in fiction as never before.

By comparison the stage villain stood for realism. Fitzball turned to actual records (just old enough to be safe from the disgust he felt for newspapers) for the plot of *Jonathan Bradford; or, The Murder At The Roadside Inn*, staged at Sadler's Wells in 1833 with a scene which showed four rooms (two upstairs) at once. There is an underground scene in the Gothic tradition, a vault where the falsely-accused innkeeper overhears the guilty footpad relate what actually happened, and the plot is as clumsy as the sentiments. But Dan Macraisy, the highwayman, is a forthright cut-throat whose humour intensifies his sardonic blood-thirstiness. "Ask? Och, that's not the way to get anything. Sure wasn't

*Mr. O. Smith as the Wolf of the Sea*

that my own elegant mother's maxim: 'Dan,' said she, in her dying injunction, the big tares tumbling down her ould cheeks, like grane gooseberries in the mackarel season;—'Dan,' said she, 'my only child—my pretty darlint, remember your poor mother's last advice; beg, borrow and stale, if you wish to be respectable, but if you once takes up with dat dere modesty, it's out o'doors you'll be kicked intirely, by fools and rogues!' " Yet even he can die in a state of repentance. When a coffin is lowered into the vault he fears he will be shut up alone with it, "The murderer wid the murdered", stabs himself, confesses he has been "a bad, heartless villain", and dies crying, "Pardon! Pardon!"

For monsters without any conscience the playgoers had to look for the name of O. Smith in the bill. He had made his name as the dying Grampus in *The Wreck Ashore*, and playwrights were now putting in parts to suit his ferocious style. One such occurs in another of the forger dramas, *Grace Huntley*, with which Henry Holl began his life as a playwright in 1833 at the Adelphi. The



*Mr Elsgood as Rawbold the Pirate*

heroine, ignoring her father's command, admits Joseph secretly to her home at night. He brings Sandy (O. Smith) to rob the house and in a scuffle her father is killed. Twelve years pass. When Grace protests that her son is being brought up to be a criminal, Joseph answers, "I'll bring him up in a way (if you continue in your brawls) shall bring the halter round his neck and you shall see your child within the hangman's hands". At the trial her husband sees the error of his ways, but Sandy growls, "I wish I'd have got hold of her, I'd have settled her".

Historical plays were beginning to develop the idea of crime exultant. At Sadler's Wells, in 1834, George Almar's *The Clerk Of Clerkenwell; or, The Three Black Bottles* contained, in addition to an outlaw who "never did an action his soul repented", a clerk who boasts to music, "To sum up all, I am a villain! The power which formed me forgot to add a heart. I know no passion but avarice, and avarice shall absorb me." When dying he asks to be



*Turpin's Ride To York*

Astley's 1836

led into the air for, "I hate ye all". But how good still triumphed over lives of evil Fitzball proved, at Drury Lane in 1835, by giving a fresh turn to an old story in *The Note Forger*. Brasstoun has grown rich by counterfeiting. Diana, his daughter, is vainly wooed by a law-abiding villain who swears revenge. Brasstoun, denounced, locks doors, flings keys on furnace, produces swords and fights to the death—a study of what virtue may lie in a criminal's not particularly inmost heart.

Dick Turpin gained fresh popularity from Harrison Ainsworth's novel, dramatized as *Rookwood; or, Dick Turpin's Ride To York*, soon after its publication in 1834. What the highwayman had to do with the Rookwoods and the gypsies who claimed the baronetcy for one of themselves could not have been apparent to an audience, but the ride, whatever its purpose, was excitingly staged. Within sight of York, Turpin has to drag Black Bess along: she dies outside the barn where the gypsies are ready for rescue. "Turpin guards the body of Black Bess with a brace of pistols. The Constables are overpowered. The burning barn lights up the effective concluding tableau." In a later version at the

Victoria, Black Bess, with all mention of the ride, was omitted. Turpin's part in the story was still a mystery, although the audience could see he was the embodiment of extravagant philanthropy, not stopping at murder in order to benefit a friend.

All was right with the world because even armed blackguards, in the right eighteenth-century setting, paid homage to virtue. The victory seemed to be with this comforting ideal (vouched for by authors of good social standing) over the cruder notions of low hacks of the Minors who wanted to make your flesh creep. But the position changed suddenly. A youth who knew what the inside of a debtors' prison was like, who had good reason to know also what child labour was like for he had worked in a blacking factory when he ought to have been at school, became the public's idol by making it laugh as it had never laughed before. While his humorous masterpiece was still coming out in monthly parts, the first chapters appeared of books in a very different strain. This prodigious young newspaperman, in novels, in articles, in speeches, was forcing his laughing audience to look at tragedy. Instead of criminals in tricorns, he exhibited the ruffian in battered topper of their own day, as well as more deadly blackguards, the trainer of infant thieves and the traffickers in young lives by means of cheap schools. The opening years of Victoria's reign witnessed this masterly achievement of Dickens in following "Pickwick Papers" with "Oliver Twist" and "Nicholas Nickleby".

Naturally they were at once transformed by eager hacks into melodramas for the Minor stage, where it was apparent that the most courageous attempt for over half a century to cure the blindness of virtue was half-hearted. These stories with happy endings, though maintaining that all was not for the best in the best of all possible worlds, yet upheld virtue triumphant. Fagin and Quilp marked a vast stride towards actuality since the day of Brian de Bois Gilbert and Frontdebœuf, because the Victorian scoundrels indicated that evil might have a bad smell. Even so, the romance of crime had yet to enjoy its wildest fling. Whatever popularity "Bentley's Miscellany" had won through a Dickens serial was surpassed directly it began in 1839 to publish "Jack Sheppard"

*Sixteen-String Jack*

Olympic 1841

by Harrison Ainsworth. Noting how eagerly copies were snatched wet from the press, hacks at half-a-dozen theatres dramatized the subject before the instalments were half-way through. At the Adelphi, in Buckstone's version, Mrs Keeley's carpentry, fisticuffs and escape from handcuffs were capped by "Nix My Dolly Pals, Fake Away", which she sang to a catchy tune. When Jack Sheppard, in a neat suit of mourning, lay on his mother's grave, he sobbed, "They tell me she forgave me before she died—bless her! Oh, villain, outcast, condemned felon that I am". There was not a dry eye in the house.

Newton Treen Hicks, so popular an actor that he had earned the name of Bravo Hicks, played Jonathan Wild, the thieftaker, in Moncrieff's *Jack Sheppard* at the Victoria in the October of 1839. When the stage mob were wildly jeering him under Tyburn Tree in the last act, the audience were so carried away that they joined in—they hissed. Hicks turned to them in surprise and they immediately shouted, "Bravo, Hicks". That performance instituted the custom of hissing stage villains.

Another romantic highwayman appeared at the Olympic in 1841. Leman Rede's *Sixteen-String Jack* had been a mere spectacle

*The "Stone Jug"*

Adelphi 1873

some years earlier; now it was rewritten to look like *Paul Clifford*, apart from the sixteen strings to the hero's boots. When Beau Brummell declares his ring to be a lady's gift, the thief replies, "Enough, sir, a lady's gift is the property of a man's heart and should be respected (bows)". On his way to Tyburn Sixteen-String Jack is reprieved by Brummell.

That the Lord Chamberlain should object to the enlisting of sympathy for crime was not unnatural. Yet his ban fell not on unchanged highwaymen, but on Jack Sheppard and he, to obtain a stage licence, changed himself into one of them. So much can be learned from a play (staged at the Adelphi in 1873) called *The "Stone Jug"* and advertised as "Compiled and arranged (by authority) from the acting versions of Harrison Ainsworth's 'Jack Sheppard'", with a notice to managers that "This is the only form in which the escapades of the popular hero of Ainsworth's Romance are allowed to be enacted on the stage; but under the present title and with the present characters, its representation has been specially sanctioned by the Lord Chamberlain". In a make-up like Jack Sheppard's, "Bob Chance" (the Idle Apprentice) was played

by Miss Hudspeth. In place of Blueskin there was a character called Jim, alias Purpleface, and instead of Wild there was Sampson Savage (thieftaker) under arrest. Bob breaks out of Newgate, the "Stone Jug", and ends under arrest, so that each playgoer can decide whether a hanging should complete the story or not.

## ACT VIII. SCENE V

*Penny Dreadfuls : The Demon Barber of  
Fleet Street*

VORACIOUS appetite explains why vast amounts of melodrama were manufactured between 1800 and 1850. The population of the British Isles was enlarging itself from eight to sixteen millions. In cities where the increase was greatest more theatres were needed, and more were provided with such enterprise that when Parliament freed the drama in 1843 the profession already had, what with play-acting booths and saloons as well as the Minors, all the freedom it needed. Blood and thunder flowed and rolled to the footlights everywhere. Yet in cold print the outbreak was more widespread still. Presses could not turn out weekly penny dreadfuls in quantities large enough. Here plots were not cut to the length of an evening's entertainment, but were limitless, lasting sometimes for a year, sometimes for two years. Demand grew with the progress of education. Between 1805 and 1836 the Royal Lancastrian Institution, the National Society for Educating the Poor, the Infant Schools and the Home and Colonial School Society persevered until their efforts were rewarded by government grants, and by the middle of the century literates numbered two or three millions—readers for what printers called the "part work". It had not only a public of its own, but authors of its own in all grades from masters to novices, with G. W. M. Reynolds above all. While lecturing in New York, Thackeray referred to his "Mysteries of the Court of London". On treating himself to

sixpennyworth of this performance at a railway station, he found "poor dear George IV" was occupied in the most flagitious designs against the tradesmen's families in his metropolitan city. Two years later sixpennyworth more of the same delectable history showed, "George IV was still at work, at ruining the peace of tradesmen's families; he had been at it for two whole years, and a bookseller at the Brighton Station told me that this book was many times the most popular of all periodical tales then published, because, says he, 'it lashes the aristocracy'!"

What the public wanted, according to what can be found in such pages, was constant threats to a female's peace of mind. This could occur against a background either of the historically picturesque or the domestically realistic, castles and tourneys in the one, basements and public-houses in the other. Reynolds had many rivals who copied his style slavishly, but there were others of independent spirit, though not so independent as to depart from the rule that the heroine's love must be desired (usually in wedlock, but always most civilly) by a villain. One example serves as well as another. Here then is "The Smuggler King; or, The Foundling of the Wreck", a Nautico-Domestic Romance published in 1844. The chief stimulant is shipwreck. William, the hero, is rescued (with locket and strawberry mark) from the sea almost at birth and survives attempted strangulation by his big brother only to play the Jonah on boat after boat. The woodcuts cannot keep up with him. On one page he looks amazed at the well-fed form of a fellow-castaway while the adjacent text says that William is alone on the island. He has to be rescued and shipwrecked again before he can meet his buxom friend in the next chapter. Meanwhile his Flora, protractedly abducted, is persecuted by the strictly honourable attentions not merely of the Smuggler King, but of all his black-hearted ruffians who sing to her in chorus:

She comes—she comes, the ocean queen,  
So bright her face, so chaste her mien;  
She comes to rule o'er the ocean tide,  
The lovely and fair, the rover's bride.

All the slow and gradual changes in the aspects of stage villainy need to be contemplated before the significance of crime exultant

can be understood. In Kean's lifetime his savage frenzy (in plays from another age) was never emulated by melodrama. His influence can be seen neither in the sentimental romanticizing of robbers, pirates and smugglers, nor in the lawbreakers who persecuted virtue in plays less compromising about right and wrong. Yet villainy had, almost imperceptibly, become more intense. Murderers as well as seducers were less inclined to repentance and remorse than the gloomy captors who deplored of old the wickedness of their deeds while committing them. Whatever it was that moved Kean in Shylock also inspired Dickens's Fagin; and whatever it was that moved Kean in Richard Crookback inspired Dickens's Quilp. Gloating over evil, as distinct from mere ruffianism, was becoming a force in fiction. It made itself felt about the turn of the century in London and Paris. On the stage of both cities appeared characters who combined all earlier forms of evil-doing in fiction. They had the recklessness of the criminals, the glamour of the highwaymen, and the unswerving ferocity of the demon from hell. Retribution had to overcome them, of course, but they met it without flinching and without remorse, still glorying in their sheer, unadulterated wickedness.

Formerly villains had rank and title. Legend, nursed through the centuries, housed them in castles. No other explanation is needed, although several have been given. While playgoing in Paris Thackeray argued that the French aristocracy "are expiating now, on the stage, the wrongs which they did a hundred years since". While inspecting penny gaffs in London he argued instead, "Popular fun is always kind: it is the champion of the humble against the great. In all popular parables, it is little Jack that conquers, and the Giant that topples down. I think our popular authors are rather hard upon the great folks". Even as he wrote, fictitious iniquity was changing. Dreadful authors (taking their cue from Dickens) were looking for ogres in the working-class. They found one who had existed for ages, though carefully ignored, possibly because of his cannibalistic taint (although this had not kept from the stage the vengeful husband who tricked his wife into eating the heart of her lover). They exhumed the fourteenth-century story of the demon barber of Paris, long for-

*Sweeney Todd, The Barber Of Fleet Street*

Britannia 1847

gotten even in the Île de Cité where he cut throats and consigned bodies to a pastrycook below, who sold them baked in his pies. If you laugh at this, remember that the humour of horror depends on remoteness, not only of time and/or space, but of ideas.

At that time the Gothic novel was still popular in a brief six-penny form or more elaborately. When the changing taste of fiction turned to crime, "The People's Periodical and Family Library" began to publish as a serial "The String of Pearls; or, The Sailor's Gift" in the November of 1846. Some weeks later the title was changed to "The String of Pearls; or, The Barber of Fleet Street". In the February of 1847, a play by George Dibdin Pitt, son of Tom Dibdin's half-brother, was licensed under the title of *A String Of Pearls; or, The Fiend Of Fleet Street* for performance at a theatre in Hoxton, named the Britannia after the tavern it belonged to. Henceforward Sweeney Todd would rank in the rogue's gallery of the penny dreadful public, second only to that perpetual idol of the nineteenth-century masses, Dick Turpin.



## ACT IX. SCENE I

*Industrial unrest*

EARTHLY providence is husbandry. Divine providence is what makes this possible. What Providence is nobody explained in the age when it was most talked about. That it was more than Nature the title-page of a sixpenny chap-book proclaimed: "DUNLEITH ABBEY; OR, MALEVOLENCE DEFEATED: IN WHICH IS DISPLAYED The Retributive Power of Providence over those who injure THE INNOCENT". Exaggerated fears of breaking the Third Commandment made people afraid to speak of God. More and more they referred to Providence, more and more they vouched for what it would and would not do, more and more gave it human passions and exalted it until they had plainly broken the Second Commandment if not the First. Exactly what horrors were to be perpetrated by this covert new religion could have been foreseen when a pale young curate, the Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus, published in 1803 an "Essay on the Principle of Population" which held that the distress of the labouring classes was ordained by Providence, and inferred that deaths from starvation were the best of all possible means of keeping the demand for food equal to the supply. Poor Law grants merely hindered the natural process which would or should cause the workers to keep down their numbers by abstaining from early marriage. He was not alone in this belief that Providence made no providence for the common people. But how it bestirs itself for the uncommon is manifest in "The Clergyman's Widow, and her Young Family", by Mrs Hoffand, a Regency chap-book which sets forth how all the children prosper, thus demonstrating how right their father was to leave them unprovided for—a moral plainly stated in a sanctimonious finale.

In such simple-minded entertainments as these, in public utter-

ance of all kinds, in House of Commons debates, in such "sciences" as political economy and in the conduct of public affairs, nineteenth-century Providence reveals its peculiarities. First it exhibits a marked bias in favour of children who have been respectably begotten, even though brought up in squalor like Paul Clifford or Oliver Twist; next a strict neutrality is discernible towards negro slaves, because their welfare can be safely left to the nobler instincts of Man; its third manifestation is towards the undeserving poor who exist as a margin of labour to be underpaid in good times and exterminated by hunger and exposure in bad times; some hostility towards these might reasonably be therefore inferred. Perhaps a critic might object that popular imagination is here being confused with public opinion and human activities of a still more solemn nature. The answer is that they were so confused in fact. Topics from vulgar amusements took shape in actuality after this fashion—Oroonoko's prolonged popularity on the stage led to the liberation of the negro, and the Jolly Jack Tar's proverbial eagerness to resist oppression caused sailors to resist lawful authority. That it was tempting Providence to talk so freely of freedom became evident in 1797 when mutiny broke out at the Nore. Even in the most law-abiding country, dramas of oppression were bound to pass from make-believe on the stage to acts of violence in real life.

There was a spirit of rebellion against Providence. People were no longer content to starve. In the time of the Man of Feeling, Dr Johnson thought that hunger caused a thousand deaths each year in London alone and found that he had underestimated the number. There had been trouble with the weavers in Spitalfields and with nailers at Birmingham in the eighteenth century, but no cause for permanent alarm. When Luddites wrecked machinery at Nottingham in 1811 there was a difference. By deeds alarming enough to be reported in the newspapers, "operatives" established that their right to live was a matter equal to interest in murder or adultery; in future, as *Luke The Labourer* suggests, ordinary men might claim some attention for themselves from popular imagination. Machine-wrecking was blood and thunder. Though not celebrated as quickly on the Surrey side as victories in

Spain, it did secretly stir men's hearts towards the exercise of virtue in the pursuit of the common good. A few years after Waterloo there was an engagement at St. Peter's Fields, Manchester, when troops skilfully disposed to cut off any possible retreat, rode down men, women and children who wanted to hear about Reform. That famous victory was not dramatized, but it was given the title of the Battle of Peterloo, which indicates what feelings it aroused. The hack, whether of printing press or the stage, being one of the crowd, was stirred like everybody else by this long struggle, the most vital ever waged on British soil, between common honesty and the new-born tyranny of hard cash.

Considering the powers of stage censorship the wonder is that democracy found any expression in plays. Yet the Minors, if only for a spell, voiced public opinion courageously before the fight for Reform was won. There was more than politics in their ardour. The drama of oppression exerted itself in a number of plays to better the condition of the masses. Drink dramas testify to the sincerity of scribblers, who as ordinary men could see alcoholic ravages that the next century would be spared. Little, if anything at all, written under the stimulus of this good purpose has any worth in literature. It might be given its due as social history instead.

## ACT IX. SCENE II

*Mutiny with and without happy endings*

ORDINARY men and women had not often been considered fit to have their portraits painted as heroes and heroines. To have brought them before the footlights as such gives Douglas Jerrold a place of honour in the history of drama when viewed as part of life rather than part of literature. At heart he was bitter, unable to feel pride in his achievement because he knew that as a man of letters he was a failure. Efforts to be

a literary genius wasted his energies. Pity for distress and violent anger against oppression were his gifts, and ordinary people, not the great characters of history, were the ones whose living portraits he drew. His training for the stage began in infancy. Under the rafters of his father's theatre at Sheerness he played one of the children who brought their parents together in Kotzebue's *The Stranger*, and he was the infant held aloft in *Pizarro* when Edmund Kean appeared there as Rolla. But another influence was stronger. The family had come to that haunt of hearts of oak in 1807 when Jerrold was aged three. Impressionable years among Nelson's men meant that shortly before his eleventh birthday he became a midshipman ("first-class volunteer") aboard the guardship *Namur*, lying in the estuary of the Thames. From a gun-brig he witnessed the transporting of troops to Belgium in 1815. At Texel he saw a seaman flogged. After Waterloo his ship brought back a party of wounded. When peace was declared the ship's company was paid off a little while before the family moved to London, where the midshipman became a printer's devil. At fifteen he was the author of a farce, at twenty the Coburg's salaried playwright—nick-named, "Little Shakespeare in a Camlet Cloak".

Ossian, Byron and Scott inspired some of his earliest dramas. At twenty-five, while still at the Coburg, he wrote *Fifteen Years Of A Drunkard's Life*, which for all its absurdities marks the beginning of his trenchant period. With a drunkard set on self-destruction there can be no moral since he would drown in water, and though drunkards kill each other by mistake a sober person is the worst shot of all; yet from this poor argument spring a life and vigour lacking in Jerrold's historical dramas. But next he had a spell of the self-despised light-heartedness that also prompted "Mrs Caudle's Curtain Lectures". After quarrelling with the miserly Coburg he walked down the road to the Surrey with *Sweet Poll Of Plymouth; or, All In The Downs* as earnest for another salaried post. Six songs had to be introduced to make it pass muster as a burletta, and among these was Gay's ballad which caused the first part of the title to change into *Black Eye'd Susan*. No drama was ever more nautical; no other seamen so redolent of tar, so virtuous compared with landsmen, so full of seafaring oaths, ex-

*Thomas à Becket*

Surrey 1820

clamations, similes and metaphors—salt water is rarely out of their mouths and often fills their eyes. William never utters a phrase that is not seaworthy. Law is built of green timber, manned with loblolly boys; a woman makes more sail—outs with her studding booms—mounts her royals, moon-rakers and sky-scrapers. Several scenes show how constant Susan is despite her landlord, and how brave William is despite many smugglers. At length the plot begins when Captain Crosstree in his cups kisses Susan and is cut down by William. All is ready for the hanging from the fore-yard when Crosstree rushes forward with a pre-dated discharge: “When William struck me he was not the King’s sailor—I was not his officer”. With T. P. Cooke as William, the piece had so much success at the Surrey that Covent Garden coveted it and there each night, with Cooke making the journey in costume, it was acted as an after-piece amid cheers.

“Surrey trash” is how Jerrold referred to it in later years, which links up with his statement, “Before I was out of my teens it was my misfortune to be compelled to write for the Minor theatres”. The main trouble was money, but there is no ignoring his love

*Mutiny At The Nore*

Coburg 1830

for the high-falutin'. While still at the Surrey he made Thomas à Becket say, when no guests came to his banquet, "I'll spread yon table with uncoffined bones, and there, behind each stool, I'll have a yew tree planted to canopy a midnight ghost". Upon which Jerrold was called "the Surrey Shakespeare". Thinking of his poor rewards he answered, "The sorry Shakespeare, you mean"—still Shakespeare. Yet when Reform called he could speak like a man. *Black Eye'd Susan* was acted in the June of 1829. Exactly a year later he contradicted it in a play—staged at the Royal Pavilion, the Coburg and the Queen's—which matched it as pictures of "Storm" matched companion pictures of "Calm". This retort, plainly deliberate, to his own hint that all was well afloat, had the uncompromising title, *The Mutiny At The Nore; or, British Sailors In 1797*, and the date was unalleviating because he laid stress not on past abuses but on abominations still unlikely to be abolished. The story is again of a lass that loves a sailor and is loved by his officer, of a cutlass drawn in righteous anger and the consequences; there are parallel scenes aboard ship preparatory to the execution; there is no reprieve. The hero is Richard Parker,

Quartermaster of the Sandwich and subsequently Admiral and President of the Court of Delegates, the leader of the mutineers. "A better man than Richard Parker", it is roundly declared, "does not live". Parker's justifications in this play far exceed those of fact. The officer, still suffering from the pangs of unrequited love, persecutes the rival he has in his power, has him wrongfully convicted of theft and causes him to be flogged. Driven by indignation to desert, Parker has been "sent through the fleet". He has served the king seven years: "in that time I have seen enough to turn the softest breasts to stone, to make me look with eyes of lead upon the blackest violence; to make me laugh at 'virtue, feelings', as words of a long-forgotten tongue. Seen! I have seen old men, husbands and fathers, men with venerable grey hairs, tied up, exposed and lashed like basest beasts: scourged, whilst every stroke of the blood-bringing cat may have cut upon a scar received in honourable fight. I have seen this, and what the culprit's fault? He may have trod too much on this side, or on that—have answered in a tone too high or too low his beardless persecutor—no matter: the crime is mutinous, and the mariner must bleed for it". Poverty has marked Parker with "her felon brand"—startling words considering how the public of many years later was surprised by the statement that poverty is a crime—and yet the brain which thought of this also invented a scene where Parker cannot fire because his child sleeps beside the cannon's mouth. As in *Black Eye'd Susan* there is a scene of farewell in a ship's cabin before the execution on deck. The Quartermaster hands a glass of wine to Parker: "He ascends the ladder, a sailor unties his cravat, the rope is prepared, tableau and CURTAIN".

In the handling of dialogue and situations Jerrold slavishly obeyed all the fashionable tricks of virtue triumphant. However high his purpose, all that he strives to say is negated by an occasional insensibility to the absurd. His readiness to be as mawkish as the most miserable pot-boiling hack is surprising in a mind bold enough to bestow all the sympathy in his plays upon persons in humble walks of life. Take, for example, *Martha Willis, The Servant Maid*, which he wrote for the Royal Pavilion, White-chapel, in 1831. Martha is waylaid as she takes the coach and is

tracked to her kitchen, a "practicable area with practicable steps". Speed, a highwayman, murders Melville after an evening at cards, steals his ring, slips into the kitchen, sees her picture of the green fields where he played as a child, and exclaims, "Oh, my dear mother!" before putting the stolen ring on Martha's finger which causes her to be sentenced to death. To Newgate, first outside and then inside, Speed comes in disguise to visit the prisoner, make full confession, swallow poison and die.

Looking upon Wilkie's companion pictures "The Rent Day" and "Distraint for Rent", Jerrold found the inspiration which took him to Drury Lane in 1832. Money is wrung from farmers in *The Rent Day* by an unjust steward while his master leads a gamester's life in London. One farmer resolves to leave home, taking nothing with him but his grandfather's chair. In a struggle with the bailiff ("Distraint for Rent") it breaks and three hundred guineas fall out. Drury Lane presented Jerrold's *The Factory Girl* the same year, but afterwards he strove for fame on the stage with literary dramas, leaving G. W. M. Reynolds to exploit his idea of a lowly-born heroine in a highly popular penny dreadful which became, at the Royal Queen's Theatre, *Mary Price; or, The Adventures Of A Servant-Girl*. The abducted heroine soliloquizes, "See, the clouds expand, and from heaven descends an angel form—it hovers o'er my head—joy! it is my mother! She comes to guard her child! Oh! bliss unutterable!" To her would-be seducer who comments, "This is becoming wearisome", thereby indicating a decline in the etiquette of villainy, she retorts, "What a pity there was not some hereditary virtue to which you might succeed". Was she thinking of piratical chivalry and cutpurse civility?



## ACT IX. SCENE III

*Factory dramas*

REVOLTS against industrial tyranny were causing, as the Royal Proclamation of 1835 put it, a great number of evil-disposed and disorderly persons "to display weapons of offence". Melodramas that are more vital than all the dramatic poetry of their time took sides in the struggle. Although little known, they are memorable as an attack against powerful evils. The boldest play of them all fearlessly champions these evil-disposed and disorderly persons. Amusement for once is less important than plain speaking. Even to-day, when its crudities are more absurd than in its own day, the honesty of it stirs the heart. That was, no matter how soon forgotten, the zenith of the drama of democracy.

Protests against such evils began on the stage unassumingly with a "comic drama" by Richard Brinsley Peake, called *The Climbing Boy; or, The Little Sweep*, at the Olympic in 1832. Though it opens with a musical concerted number, solo and chorus, followed by songs, musical finales, descriptive music and comic medleys, it is melodrama with a more than usually serious purpose. Similarly, *The Sea*, by C. A. Somerset, staged at the Queen's in 1834, has a word or two bearing on reality amid its melodramatics, for its hero says to his captain, "I trust the day is not far distant, when so foul a stain to our national character as the laceration of a fellow-creature's flesh, will be blotted from old England's naval and military code for ever".

Democracy spoke still more plainly when John Walker, author of but three other plays, and those of no account, wrote *The Factory Lad* for the Surrey in 1834. The master of the factory decides to have his looms propelled by steam, and discharges the hands. While they are wondering what to do, they meet the half-crazed poacher who tells them how they will be served by overseers of poor relief. This was the year of the Poor Law Amendment Bill,

*The Climbing Boy; or, The Little Sweep*

Olympic 1832

which purposed to abolish all grants in aid of wages and proffered the hospitality of the Union Workhouses instead. Audiences knew of this when they heard the poacher explain, "After begging and telling them what they know to be the truth—that you have a wife and five, six or eight children, one, perhaps, just born, another, mayhap, just dying—they'll give you eighteen pence to support them all for the week, and if you dare to complain, not a farthing; but place you in the stocks, or scourge you through the town as a vagabond! This parish charity! I have known what it is. My back is still scored with the marks of their power. The slave abroad, the poor black whom they affect to pity, is not so trampled on, hunted and ill-used as the peasant or hard-working fellows like yourselves, if once you have no home nor bread to give your children". When they agree to conspire, he declares that heaven calls for vengeance and the sky shall be like blood. Some fire the factory. The master has them all, guilty and innocent alike, arrested. The poacher recognizes Justice Bias as the workhouse overseer who had caused him, at the age of seven, to be sentenced to hard labour for stealing a handful of apples while himself

*The Factory Strike*

Royal Victoria 1836

guilty of robbing the paupers of their food. Then this prisoner kills the master of the factory in court. The curtain leaves it to be inferred that innocent men will be hanged. For once, and "once" literally seems true, a public entertainment made denial of virtue's everlasting triumphs. Such blasphemy against the dearest dream of multitudes was a portent. These were savage times, how savage is evident in Sir Robert Peel's solemn declaration that "to limit the hours of child labour would restrict trade and drive capital from England".

*The Factory Strike; or, Want, Crime And Retribution* at the Royal Victoria (as the Coburg had been re-named) answered the Surrey's outburst in 1836, two years later. No other play by its author, G. F. Taylor, is on record, though his seems to be a practised hand. This time the employer desires to "serve my neighbour, and by acts of justice and benevolence prove myself not unworthy of those benefits which heaven has blessed me". But as times are bad he must cut wages. Strikers, led by a highwayman, burn down his factory and kill the master. Though on the side of law and order, the author has no good word for the Poor Law

*The Factory Boy*  
Surrey 1840

overseers; a poor wretch is sent away from their doors because they are at wine. To save his starving children he cries "money or your life" to his former employer's son, a kindly soldier who gladly hands him his purse—and then is murdered by the highwayman. A benevolent judge reluctantly sentences the victim of circumstantial evidence to death. Here the performance becomes more lively. There is an "Extensive View" by night; the mail, drawn by four horses, is attacked by the highwayman and there are spirited fights before he is mortally wounded. In delirium he reveals his guilt while crying out for vengeance. Meanwhile the victim soliloquizes, "All my sorrows, all my misery, I owe to that which has raised itself up in the land like a giant, and is worship'd by the working class, like a demigod, I mean a strike!" Judge, officers, countrymen, and villagers throng into his cell with the news that he is free.

In the House of Commons Lord Ashley was seeking to strengthen his Factory Act of 1833 which made it illegal to employ infants under nine years of age, and ordered that those above that age should not work more than nine hours a day. As desperate

*The Factory Lad*

Surrey 1834

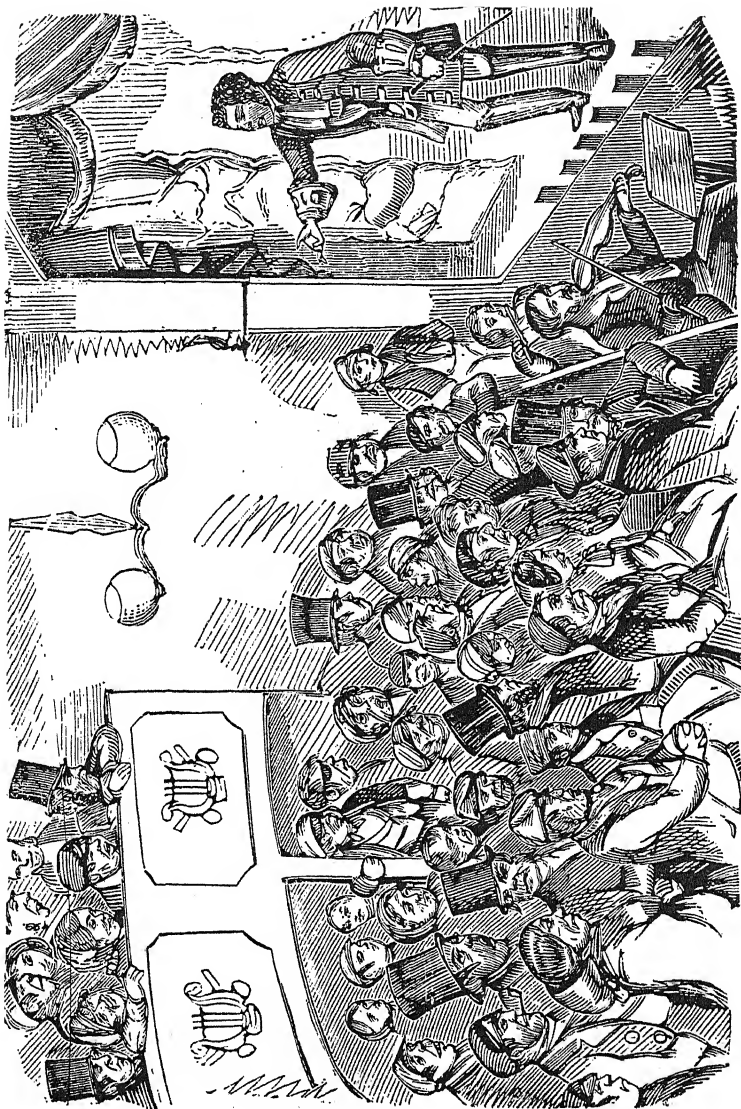
parents were as ready as employers to evade this law, Lord Ashley introduced a bill to enforce its regulations. It was lost by a large majority. Infants continued to be the wage-earners because cheap labour was preferred in industrial areas where men without hope of work were joining the armed crowds that made riots of regular occurrence. Now "Oliver Twist" came out in "Bentley's Miscellany" in 1838—that same year *Oliver Twist; or, The Parish Boy's Progress* was billed at the Pavilion, Whitechapel, with other versions at the Adelphi and elsewhere—to make the link between crime exultant and social evil plain. These also exist side by side in "Nicholas Nickleby" and "The Old Curiosity Shop". In still more forthright fashion the Minor theatres had transferred the horror of their audiences from evil in human nature to evil in the social system. Plays about cut-throats had been followed by plays about factory-owners. There was a vast difference in these subjects, and a vast difference in the feelings excited. Yet melodrama, on passing from one to the other, did not always change its style. In the background the horrors inflicted by industrialism upon the country at that very moment were shown faithfully, though

moderately. In the foreground the old stories of dispossessed heirs, long-lost children, falsely accused innocence and other wrongs that had to be righted by an infallibly just and merciful Providence were told in the old high-falutin' strains. Horrors had become part of the English scene. Even the liveliest pages could not ignore them altogether. Muggleton, in *Pickwick's* time, was any corporate English town which mingled "a zealous advocacy of Christian principles with a devoted attachment to commercial rights; in demonstration whereof, the mayor, corporation and other inhabitants" had presented at divers times no fewer than one thousand four hundred and twenty petitions against the continuance of negro slavery abroad, and an equal number against any interference with the factory system at home.

## ACT IX. SCENE IV

*The Chartists and popular entertainment*

FROM Ratchliffe Highway to Marylebone, from King's Cross to the New Cut, where chimney-sweeps and dustmen spread soot and grime on closely packed benches, penny gaffs had turned London into a city of playgoers. In these dingy halls, some seating two thousand, the drama of oppression was constantly acted in one or other of its remarkably unvaried types. Patriotism was regularly applauded; yet the Grenadier Guards, on their way to entrain for duty against the turbulent North, were reviled by angry crowds. The Duke of Wellington's windows were broken while Napoleon rose to his apotheosis in the Amphitheatre's sawdust-and-tan. The Queen told Parliament, "I rejoice at the progress which has been made in my colonial possessions, towards the entire abolition of Negro Apprenticeship", and Prince Albert told the Society for the Extinction of the Slave Trade, "I sincerely trust that this great country will not relax in its efforts until it has finally and for ever put an end to a state of



*Mr Bianchi's "dukey", High Street, Shoreditch*  
From "Paul Pry", Number 15, 1856

*My Poll And My Partner Joe*

Surrey 1835

things so repugnant to the principles of Christianity and the best feelings of our nature'. Few saw the irony of such high-principled utterances at a time when the apprenticeship of orphans in England was so much worse than slavery that these infants could be set adrift on moors to starve when even free labour was temporarily not wanted.

In the midst of outrages that no people in the past had ever perpetrated upon its own young, the pride in freeing slaves in remote corners of the earth still filled theatres with smoke, cheers, and the strains of "Rule Britannia". John Thomas Haines scored the outstanding success of Transpontine drama in these troubled years with *My Poll And My Partner Joe* at the Surrey in 1835, with T. P. Cooke as Harry Halliyard, Pride of Battersea Hard and true lover of Mary Maybud, called "Pretty Poll of Putney". From the Crown & Crozier, the Hard or landing-place can be seen through the window at the back, with boats passing and re-passing. Watermen are smoking and drinking when Black Brandon, captain of a slaver, mutters "I never forget an insult", and causes Harry to be pressed into service. Stirring engagements at sea, with



the rescue of slaves, the capture by a landing party of the slaver's island, end with the return to Portsmouth where on the roof of a coach, seen through a window, a sailor dances a hornpipe as it starts. Harry finds that Mary is now married, and "bursts into a passion of tears". But her husband, brought in dying, murmurs with his last breath, "Here's your Mother's will", which urges Harry and Mary to marry. So little pothor is made over the love tangle and so much spirit put into the combats that the moral of *My Poll And My Partner Joe* is plain. Every slave should rejoice to be freed. Every Englishman should rejoice to be pressed.

The fantastic hypocrisy of the England the young queen had inherited still causes a shudder. "Supersensitive" was said of Dickens when he attempted enlightenment. "Exaggerated" was the way smug critics silenced a still more courageous and outspoken novelist. Mrs Frances Trollope—forgotten partly because she was overshadowed by her famous son, and partly because ordinary readers quail before the bulk of her two hundred books—did not enliven her satires with mere entertainment. Nor did she trouble to make them acceptable. When she lashed self-seeking ministers of religion she chose a Church of England vicar, not a Nonconformist Chadband. When she disclosed what factories were like she did not pretend that these "horrid earthy hells" were created by criminal monsters, but depicted brutality towards poor people's children as a part of the social system. The charge of exaggeration might seem justified were it not for reports drawn up by municipal officers, which are historical records of squalor more repulsive than any a novelist has imagined, for even Mrs Trollope says little about ordure and stench. She describes children with a look of premature old age tending machines under the eyes of overlookers, strap in hand, little scavengers collecting fragments of cotton from the floor and falling flat to let the hissing "mules" pass over them—accidents frequently occurred. The heroine of "The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy" is an heiress. On a tour of inspection she finds a dying mother with one child smashed by a billy-roller and another lamed by falling asleep from exhaustion against the machinery. A fainting girl is being dragged to the factory by a mother scared

of the fine for keeping a child-labourer at home. A sick boy, carried to and from the factory, is strapped to death. A Sunday-school, run by "a serious gentleman as owns a factory", compels children to attend though they have been working until midnight and cannot keep awake. Orphans meet a worse fate in a "Prison Prentice-House" where boys raid the trough in a pigsty for luxuries. Twelve parts of "The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, The Factory Boy" were published in 1840. The author purposed to write a second volume about "Those perfectly constitutional struggles for the amelioration of the sufferings of his class, in which many of the more enlightened operatives have been for some years engaged". But as the cause had been sullied by deeds of violence and blood, she changed her mind even though the "virtuous struggle" had been against "the lawless power which oppresses them".

There is only one clue to the contradictory spirit of the eighteen-thirties. This is the passion for idealization. Every man from the famished striker to the Duke of Wellington was upholding a high principle. That was part of melodrama's process of making emotion do the work of thought. The "operatives", who first defied authority with the cry of "A fair day's pay for a fair day's work", which could be understood, became the Chartists. Instead of demanding food for dying children and rest for pregnant wives, which "the best feelings of our nature" could not have denied them, they set out to teach the country politics. A very good lesson it undoubtedly was, for their Charter became gradually absorbed into the British Constitution in its essentials, but that was neither the cause of their uprising nor the claim they had on public sympathy. As would-be legislators they gave Parliament indisputable right to resist unauthorized rivalry. Their march on London in 1848 came to nothing because their leader's courage failed when he was held responsible for any deaths that might be caused by acts of violence. It was an anticlimax and recognized as such by the theatres. The revolution that statesmen had foretold was bloodless, and for that reason left no impress on popular imagination where many an unmeaning act of bloodshed is unfailingly remembered. Yet it had its day, as those factory

*Simon Lee; or, The Murder Of The Five Fields Copse*

City of London 1839

dramas tell. For ten years the theatre was brave which is more than it has been ever since.

The zeal for social reform that burned in so many playwrights' breasts may be variously interpreted. Either they gladly seized the chance to express their honest indignation, as Jerrold did, or else the fashion he had set had to be profitably exploited. Whatever their motive, worthy or unworthy, there were such real evils to be exposed that the protests rang true whether penned by Dickens or by the anonymous scribbler of penny gaffs and penny dreadfuls. Even John Thomas Haines, whose usual work was to make hasty "original" versions of plays which were succeeding at rival houses, wrote a factory drama. His *The Factory Boy; or, The Love Sacrifice* was staged at the Surrey in 1840. Magnus Mule is a rich mill-owner, near the front of whose "Pillar'd and Verandah'd" mansion Billy Roller starves because his father, wrongfully accused of stealing warp, has been hanged and his mother has died exhausted at the factory gate in a snowstorm. There are fights and murders until, for no reason at all, a curtain is pulled back to discover "a party of Seamen and Marines drawn up" and

ready to fire at villainy. Whatever John Thomas Haines intended at the start, old habit was too strong for him in the end. Likewise, it was too strong for melodramatists in general. To serve democracy was less important than to entertain it.

But revolt had left one permanent trace—poachers were stamped as “sympathetic” characters. The City of London, in 1839, staged *Simon Lee; or, The Murder Of The Five Fields Copse*, by George Dibdin Pitt, with himself as the miser who casts off his daughter. Her husband shoots a gamekeeper and is sentenced to death, the sheriff commenting, “The prejudice of the rich against poachers has doubtless increased the severity of Simon’s sentence”. Part of this domestic drama was often used by future hacks in plots with more scope for ultimate happiness.

## ACT X. SCENE I

*Stage and barricade*

THAT ardour for Napoleon which filled English circuses with red light was a faggot from the blaze in Paris. Other entertainments besides sawdust battles made it seem as though popular imagination in both countries burned in one fire. But what were likenesses when seen apart became contrasts close to. Instead of Dickens, France had Eugene Sue, one a novelist who made melodrama serve the humanitarian ideal, the other a novelist who made the humanitarian ideal serve melodrama. Instead of Edmund Kean, France had Frédérick-Lemaître, an actor who made passion exult, not in tragedy but melodrama. The background on both sides of the Channel was a struggle for social reform, here a frustrated rising that yet made its charter law, and there victorious insurgents whose charter was scrapped.

Nothing so symmetrical could form the whole truth. How simple, how very simple, this would be were odd-shaped pieces of evidence which ought to belong to some other jig-saw puzzle merely omitted. Since virtue triumphant went on from strength to strength there would be no difficulty if a chronicle were written as though the world witnessed nothing but its steady, unruffled progress. Nor is there much hindrance in such back-slidings as the craze for romanticizing crime, for we have always known that as soon as human nature has reached one extreme it hankers after the other. Any such graph of popular imagination would be misleading, though evidence for it can be found in what was borrowed by London from Paris, and by Paris from London. Strong similarities of taste which suggest that "the public" was much the same in both capitals conceal significant differences.

There was the influence upon the Continental mind of Byron's disillusioned pose. When forgotten in his own country it was

powerful wherever the younger members of a dispossessed aristocracy, old or new, felt wronged by fate and let their grievance provoke a desire for splendid vice. In order to reconcile indulgence in this with hope for the future of the race, a creed called Simonianism, after Claude Henri, Comte de Saint Simon who wrote "Réorganisation de la Société Européenne" (1814) and "Nouveau Christianisme" (1825), recommended a réchauffé of reason, sensuality, and utilitarianism instead. It was too much for British stomachs, but German exiles in Paris sent the recipe home until there was a reaction in favour of morality (only one grade below "German nationality") carried to no matter what extreme of canting hypocrisy. In Paris the mess was cooked and overturned by the *bouleversements politiques* of a country split into factions, each of which was split into factions. Theatres, like everything else, were affected and those of the Boulevard turned one against the other, though all were devoted to the drama of democracy. Paris entertainments were as disordered as Parisian politics, not because of a demand for some new thing, but because of sheer inability to shake off any old thing.

Waterloo was an earthquake which exhumed each layer of the buried past to mingle with new ruins. One descendant of Le Roi Soleil stood for the divine right of priests and kings and for the joys of a dissolute life, while another wished to be a father to his people in the manner of Rousseau. There was also a Duke of Orleans, inheriting all the ideas that had brought his father at last to the guillotine, including treachery towards the fleur-de-lys, though his heart had been set upon virtue ever since he learned to lisp its name at the knee of Madame de Genlis. All these had Royalist followers at war with one another. There were Republicans, some swearing by the high-minded Lafayette, some pinning their faith to Lafitte, the blameless banker, some devoted only to the guillotine. There were Buonapartists, some praying for the Emperor's son, some for his nephew, some for an emperor of any sort rather than none, and some for putting back the clock to the days of military glory. Veterans of the Grande Armée looked to Marshal Soult, now a political leader, for a sign; they saw it, instead, in Franconi's arena, where the equestrian drama,

fighting Napoleon's battles over again, decided the destiny of France by steadily making converts to the Second Empire of the future.

While this, even in sawdust and tan, was a shining mirage, how could king or statesmen rule? To curb theatre and press was dangerous; to allow either to inflame the passions of the mob was dangerous. To imprison a poet for composing political songs was madness; to leave him free to compose them was madness. "Not a grisette in Paris but sings and feels the songs of Béranger", wrote Heine. His Buonapartist poetry was so well loved by the people that other poets, great and small, wrote similar verses to make themselves popular. "Victor Hugo, whose lyre yet resounds with the hymn to consecrate Charles X, has begun, with the romantic audacity which characterizes his genius, to celebrate the Emperor. People think that the son of the Man has only to appear to put an end to the present government." There would be riots, for whatever party was in power would be outnumbered by the several parties out of power; and political discontent was aggravated by labour troubles at Lyons now that English factories, using cheap labour, were flooding European markets. Yet this grim reminder that industrialism was upon them did not prevent nobles and priests from thwarting the liberal charter of Louis XVIII. His brother, Charles X, held views to their liking and these were opposed at the barricades whose defenders rose from defeat to triumph while the royal army was celebrating its victories over the Bey of Algiers.

These events serve as another reminder that what we call "dramatic literature" is largely composed of relics, often shrivelled relics. The "book of the play" is not the play. It is not even the play that the reader of its own time might imagine, far less the play in performance. Who now would look twice at the opening line of Victor Hugo's *Cromwell*—"Tomorrow, the 25th of June, 1657"—and feel the shock of a literary revolution? That is often cited. Yet Hugo's prefaces record better instances. He wrote *Marion De Lorme* when Charles X was on the throne. It was suppressed, with a kingly offer of a fresh pension of 4,000 francs to make amends. But the author, determined to fight for

liberty against arbitrary rule, refused the bribe. That occurred in 1829, the last year of the Bourbon Restoration. After victory had been won at the barricades the next July, Hugo refused to allow *Marion De Lorme* to be acted lest it should provoke "insult and attack upon the deposed king who had prohibited it". Other plays affected and were affected by politics still more violently.

The fighting of July 1830 began on the 27th and did not finish until the 29th. The Opéra, closed for two weeks, was not reopened until August 4, and on that date Eugène Scribe's *La Muette* offered on the stage a faithful picture of the barricades, the revolt and the battles which had just been seen in the streets of Paris. "Two months later, after serving as propaganda in France, *La Muette* was taken to Belgium, where it took a no less active part in the incidents of September there; and from those days this opera took on the revolutionary character which it has always had since", writes Mr Neil Cole Arven in his account of Eugène Scribe, published at Harvard in 1924.

The hero of *La Muette* is Masaniello, properly Tomaso Aniello, a young fisherman who headed a revolt at Naples in 1647, against the Spanish Viceroy and his taxes. After settling the dispute in the spirit of a born statesman, he returned to his hut and became so insanely arrogant that his own people flung his head into a sewer and gave him a magnificent funeral. These events were dramatized by an eye-witness's play published in London two years later. Tom D'Urfey wrote a double play about Masaniello which was published in 1700. For future use the tale was too inflammable for Britain and too cautionary for France until the time came for it to be changed into a tale of innocence betrayed, decked out with passages of dumbshow. The honour of the fisherman's sister, *La Muette*, signified at one and the same time both aspects of virtue triumphant, one moral and the other political.



## ACT X. SCENE II

*Les Mystères De Paris, Les Bohémiens De Paris,  
Les Pauvres De Paris*

AFTER those three days of hard fighting the *bourgeoisie* were masters of Paris. Lafayette could dispose of the government as he pleased. Louis-Philippe, Duke of Orleans, went to meet him at the Hotel de Ville, and won him over to the belief in a throne surrounded by republican institutions under the tricolour. Lafayette presented him from the balcony to the mob as their citizen king. Over paving stones pitted by bullets Paris could still be gay. Heine described how in 1832, along the boulevards at *mi-carême*, the dance-halls were crowded. Heated by the violence of the *chahut*, lively harlequins rushed out for ices and cold liquor. One, crying out that his legs were frozen, took off his mask and showed a violet-blue face. Laughter ended; the motley of carnival fell limp, then lifeless. Carriages drove victims away to the Hotel Dieu where the patients cried out in terror against this new threat of death. Some had to be buried at once, still dressed for *mi-carême*. Merrily as they passed the last hours of their lives, so merrily they would lie in their graves.

Waverings of faith in the power of Providence ended when the fear of cholera gripped great cities. Simonianism could make no headway against reality so grim. The devil in crime exultant was sick and virtue triumphant claimed all penitents. Among them was another seafarer to be ranked with Fenimore Cooper, Douglas Jerrold, and Thomas Potter Cooke. Virtue made a very sudden convert of Eugene Sue. Splendid vice in the Faubourg St. Germain fascinated his youth. At his birth in 1804 his father was the Imperial Guard's surgeon-in-chief and the babe was sponsored at the font by the Empress Josephine and Prince Eugene Beauharnais. Medicine was the hereditary profession of the family. As surgeon he was aboard the Breslau in 1827 at the

appeasement battle of Navarino, won by a British admiral without his government's permission in a war between Turkey and Greece.

At the age of twenty-five Sue came into a fortune and indulged first in riotous living, then in painting, and then in writing. Sea stories led to a naval history which won him a medal from derisive captains. So far his imperialist sentiments had inspired an atmosphere of Byronic disillusion and fatalism, but round about 1840 he felt a strong surge of democratic sympathy and expressed it in melodramatic feuilletons. The "Journal des Débats" had been publishing his "Les Mystères de Paris" as a serial for two years before it took shape as twenty volumes in 1842. The reigning prince of Gerolstein, Rodolph, purposes "to know those classes whom poverty crushes, hardens, and depraves". With his faithful English henchman, Sir Walter Murphy, he rescues La Goualeuse from the underworld of Paris. She tells him her name is Fleur-de-Marie, and adds, "Ah! To be entirely happy we must be entirely virtuous". He thinks of his lost child who (had she lived) would be of her age, sixteen years. Sue tells how unfortunates are rescued by "the powerful magic of these words—*duty, honour, virtue*". The villainous "Schoolmaster" lures Rodolph into a thieves' kitchen, where he is stunned and flung into a deep dungeon, flooded by the Seine at high tide; the water rises, he sits on the top step and is covered with rats before he is snatched from certain death. More horrors occur through the notary Ferrand, a miserly and sadistic voluptuary, but at length Fleur-de-Marie is revealed as Princess Amelia. She enters a convent and dies.

Sue's plot had lasting effects on popular fiction, not alone in episodes of rising waters in cramped quarters. Paris streets were successfully dramatized by other hands before he tried, in collaboration, to get his novel on the stage. Though Charles Dillon's *The Mysteries Of Paris, A Romance Of Rich And Poor*, acted at The Marylebone in 1844 with comic relief from "Mike Murphy", had not many rivals in London, Sue's imitators stayed before the footlights till the end of the century. In particular *Les Bohémiens De Paris*, originally presented at the Ambigu in 1843, was adapted throughout the world. One generation saw it as a photograph of

London and another as one of New York, though the plot turned on the French idea, unthinkable in Anglo-Saxon countries, of a marriage arranged not by the parties mainly concerned, but by their fathers.

The mould had been shaped for a style of melodrama which would remain popular no matter how fashions in other styles would come and go. *Les Pauvres De Paris*, by Brisebarre and Nus at the Ambigu in 1856, creates a similar though less ruffianly atmosphere. A lawyer robs the widow and orphans of a ship's captain. There is a ne'er-do-well who knows the secret; the tenement where he lives is fired and he perishes in the flames but not before he has passed on information to "les pauvres" which eventually restores their fortunes. Belot's *Les Etrangleurs De Paris*, at the Porte-Saint-Martin in 1880, continued the tradition with scenes of opulence at the Opéra and poverty at the Pont Neuf. No matter what else might change, the Seine usually played a principal part.

Sue began another theatrical vogue in Paris when he dramatized his romance of the Wandering Jew, published in 1844-5. Biblical dramas increased rapidly; they included *Belshazzar's Feast*, *Nebuchadnezzar*, *The Massacre Of The Innocents*, *Joseph And His Brethren*, *The Passage Of The Red Sea*, and *The Deluge*. Holy Writ has, from time to time in the history of virtue triumphant, had sudden bursts of popularity among playwrights or would-be playwrights. Inspired by the example of Racine, Madame de Genlis used Old Testament stories for plays which were translated by Holcroft. Joseph, one of her heroes, has appeared regularly before the footlights.

## ACT X. SCENE III

*Frédéric-Lemaître : Le Chiffonier De Paris*

AS played at the Porte-Saint-Martin in 1843 *Les Mystères De Paris* was remarkable for the frenzies—miserly, sexual, hypocritical, bloodthirsty—of Ferrand. The actor was Frédéric-Lemaître, to give him his stage-name, otherwise Antoine Louis Prosper Lemaître, born at Havre on July 28, 1800. In his boyhood he proved how strongly he felt the contradictory spirit of his century by becoming first a volunteer and then a deserter on Napoleon's return from Elba. No other way to glory was left but the stage. His lungs were so good that when he applied at the Variétés-Amusantes, he was allowed to roar as the lion in *Pyrame Et Thisbe*. Next he appeared at Franconi's as a wicked gondolier in *Othello*, so arranged that the Moor could apologize in the nick of time for being jealous of a fugitive brother-in-law.

As early as 1819 the pro-Buonapartist drama occupied Franconi's with *La Mort De Kléber; ou, Les Français En Egypt*, in honour of a Republican and Imperial general; Lemaître, as the assassin, was hissed throughout. As a villain he was engaged at the Ambigu in the July of 1823 for *L'Auberge Des Adrêts*, but what had been meant for a tearful success became a howling success when he gayed it. Robert Macaire, on being accused by his son of blood-guiltiness, replied, "What else could you expect, my son? We all have our faults". One night he forgot to kill a gendarme, apologized to the audience, and promised that the next night he would kill two.

After this there could not be so very many more bandits, and no great terrors in wayside inns. And with these would go the parricides, infanticides, fratricides of local barons inscrutably set on bloodshed. But though an actor's revolt against worn-out tricks may be the ostensible reason why they were done away with, the fact remains that they were already worn out. Cut-

throats in Calabria might have excited the sans-culottes, but the new society, with its leaning towards Simonianism, wanted to hear of implacable sexual indulgence with special reference to the supposedly ultra-Byronic aristocracy of the British Isles. Such a change brought the stage no closer to reality. The society created for the popular imagination to romp in, was as unlike anything that ever existed as the wildest extravagances conjured up by the cult of mystery and terror. But verisimilitude was not the aim. Paris would serve as well as London for setting, provided an excuse could be found for deeds of sexual violence. There was no vogue in the English theatre corresponding to this, and judging by the way such plots suffered a sea change during the Channel crossing, it is reasonable to suppose that the Surreyside barely knew what the Boulevard was driving at. French playwrights at this time were not children of the theatre but men of the world after the type of Sue. Victor Ducange, born in 1783 at The Hague where his father was attached to the French Embassy, had held a government post under the Empire. At the restoration he took to writing, and turned out sixty novels besides many plays in twenty years. He spoke his mind freely about the Bourbons, served seven months in prison for describing the massacres of 1815, and was a moralist, responsive to the century's spirit of social reform. In his writing he also, to use the contemporary phrase, "tombe dans la licence". Most playwrights of the Boulevard did so, for their melodramas usually mixed sermons with sex.

For the moral tone, which led to happiness, regular use was made of father and daughter. Lemaître was often the suffering parent, but he was also *Cartouche* (French equivalent of Jack Sheppard), who was broken on the wheel in 1721 and immediately dramatized both in Paris and London. Now in 1827 he was portrayed as brutal, cynical, gay, gallant, and brave. After raping Camille and leaving her to perish in her burning château, he impersonates the comte, her brother; when unmasked he escapes with spoils that include Alphonsine, who is rescued by an old woman—Camille in disguise; he is caught at last and goes mockingly to his doom. These indicate Lemaître's style at the Ambigu. To begin his engagement at the Porte-Saint-Martin in 1827, he

*The Gambler's Fate; or, The Hut Of The Red Mountain*

Coburg 1828

effected a revolutionary change. *Trente Ans; ou, La Vie D'Un Joueur*, by Ducange and Dinaux, caused playgoers to cry out in fear, so startling was the sense of tragic reality it created. The story, a cynic might have commented, had had this effect before—Edward Moore's *The Gamester*, which upset audiences at Drury Lane in 1753, supplies most of the plot used in 1827, though admonitory melodrama began with *Trente Ans* because it exploited the desire of a virtuous public to be warned against sins it had no intention of committing; in the wild and desperate form given to these by Ducange and his partner the moral was highly acceptable to the respectable classes whom the Porte-Saint-Martin attracted. The effect on London was immediate. Milner wrote *The Hut Of The Red Mountain; or, Thirty Years Of A Gambler's Life* for the Coburg the next year (against gambling, in favour of drink), and Jerrold modelled his *Fifteen Years Of A Drunkard's Life* on it the year after. It remained in Lemaître's repertoire though he constantly created new rôles, among them some which were, like Macaire, to remain landmarks of acting until the end of the century. In 1828 he played Edgard de Ravenswood in Ducange's

*La Fiancée De Lamermoor*, and Mephistopheles in a version of *Faust* which Gounod's librettists were to follow. This devil had no need of music, not even the usual cues. When a chef d'orchestre composed a suite of signature tunes for all the leading characters, so Georges Cain tells in "Ancien Théâtres de Paris", Frédérick-Lemaître objected with, "Pardon, monsieur le chef, pardon, but your violins are worse than useless. I need a very simple accompaniment. The tune . . . is myself".

As Louis-Philippe, surviving seven attempts on his life, approached the end of his compromising reign, popular entertainments took more and more a major part in politics. There was a censorship; it appeared to permit whatever was most harmful to the throne; and although the ban would sometimes belatedly descend, the effect in such cases would be to increase the power of adverse propaganda. The circus varied its allegiance to Napoleon merely in order to exert its influence more directly against Louis-Philippe. This was in a spectacle at the Théâtre National du Cirque Olympique, still called Franconi's, in the January of 1847. Under the title of *La Revolution Française* it illustrated those glorious feats of arms that kept the Republic safe from invaders, and recalled how French cavalry had charged the Dutch fleet when the ships were fast in the ice. Ostensibly these pages of history redounded to the glory of Louis-Philippe's youth when he fought for the Tricolour, but the actual effect was to insinuate that the doubts of his loyalty to the Republic in 1793 had been justified by his assumption of royalty now. This was critical reasoning. The emotional appeal was in a melodrama dominated by Frédérick-Lemaître. *Le Chiffonier De Paris*, by Felix Pyat, ran at the Porte-Saint-Martin from the spring of 1847 until the following February, when freedom was again at the flood. Jean the rag-picker was the very spirit of that day when the ideals of virtue triumphant and democracy triumphant were identified. The curtain rose on a dismal nocturne by the Seine where Jean, drunk, tells the suicidal Garousse to live and be merry. As a result of this homily a cashier is murdered. Twenty years pass. The victim's daughter, Marie, is accused of murdering a baby mysteriously left at her lodgings; it is the love-child of the Baron Hoffman's

daughter. A clue to the secret is found by Jean when he picks from his mass of rags a bundle of bank-notes, the assassin's fee. He sets out to discover the truth in the mansion of the Baron, whose face is strangely familiar—Garousse. Jean is plied with claret, champagne, and brandy, robbed of the evidence and handed over to the police with clues in his pockets to the murder of the cashier twenty years ago. Virtue triumphs even over this new foe—crime puissant.

How exactly *Le Chiffonier* belonged to its day was evident at the next revolution which broke out when the Reform banquet was forbidden. Barricades were thrown up on February 23 and the next day Louis-Philippe abdicated. Directly a republic was proclaimed on the 26th, the Porte-Saint-Martin reopened with an afternoon performance free to all people in arms. No celebration of the victory eclipsed the moment when Lemaître picked out of his ragbag first the crown and then a police notice, "Les Banquets sont interdits".



## ACT XI. SCENE I

*Scamps of London*

BY the time the Chartists had subsided, the early Victorians disliked "Back to Nature" and favoured "Arts and Sciences" as their battle-cry. Neither art nor science was invoked. The maternal spirit of civilization, represented by innumerable commissions and committees, societies and associations, adopted the tone of nursery instructors who told infants first to be good and then to be practical, since there was not much point in virtue if you were not going to make money out of it. Philanthropic bodies took the broader view; they wanted everybody to make money out of it. There was energetic building of Mechanics' Halls, both in Great Britain and America, to keep people out of theatres, though before very long these halls were used as theatres or places of still commoner amusement.

For those twin ideals Prince Albert is often held responsible, largely because the Hall and the Memorial raised to him are also raised to them. Other worthies are similarly commemorated, but none in particular is responsible for the vast and imposing cult expressive of a general desire to muzzle Darwin and handcuff painters who drew the likeness of Christ. What Arts and Sciences stood for was "mental improvement" as a method of moral improvement. Earth rolled onward into virtue's triumphant light. Faith in the millennium was taking pragmatism form. Industry and Education were necessary to its accomplishment. Great Exhibitions began to arise on the smallest provocation. Little exhibitions were foisted on a far from unwary public as amusements—Panopticons and Great Globes—and as such ignominiously failed. "Combining Amusement with Instruction" was the label for a type of juvenile fiction which had given pleasure since the days of Sandford and Merton, those schoolboys with sharply contrasted

powers of observation, and Goody Two-Shoes, who ran a village school so charmingly. School-boys' classics would continue to be written that way. For adults the instruction was in virtue and as such was accepted, although not humble playgoers but the authorities needed the lesson. Hangings were still public displays. Parliament in 1846 gave its blessing to flogging in the Army, a humanitarian Commander-in-Chief having decided to limit the number of lashes to fifty. Children were still the object of brutality: London Unions and Guardians sent their orphans to Drewett's Infant Poor Establishment at Tooting where 112, out of the 1,500 it housed, died in a week from cholera in 1849 because of "insufficient food, defective clothing, and impure air".

The harshness of that outside world has to be known before the love of depicting philanthropy in fiction can be understood. It indicates why the Cheeryble Brothers were brought into existence. It helps to explain masses of entertainments from plays that were billed as "Great Moral Dramas" to most of the novels of Dickens. There was sore need of assurance that the world was not complacent in its evil: the desire for this went so deep that it was taken for granted. Dickens himself was unaware that his plots were constructed like melodrama, so unaware that he could mock at his own view of life because he thought it the only possible view of life and therefore funny when exaggerated merely because it was exaggerated. In "Two Views of a Cheap Theatre", included in "The Uncommercial Traveller", he describes how, at the performance of a melodrama, he was "pleased to observe Virtue quite as triumphant as she usually is out of doors, and, indeed, I thought, rather more so". The audience was as hard as iron upon Vice and "wouldn't hear of Villainy getting on in the world—no, not on any consideration whatever".

There is more in this than an archbishop's smile at some sermon in a tin chapel. The religion itself is ridiculed unwittingly. Melodrama was now so much second nature that the highly moral did not know they were highly moral, did not know of any difference between the ordinary course of life and their creed of virtue triumphant except when this was expressed in its crudest form. The times being as they were, with the name of St. Stephen con-

*The Heart Of London*

Adelphi 1830

juring up the awful image which persisted at Westminster of smug, middle-age contentedly unaware of human needs, some understanding must be brought to bear on early-Victorian entertainments even in their most finger-wagging mood. "Be good and be practical" was not uncalled for, even though it might be regarded as merely the automatic consequence of crime exultant—after showing what came of vice, playwrights would naturally turn attention to what rewards might be expected from virtue.

How naturally the change was made is evident in Moncrieff's *The Heart Of London; or, The Sharper's Progress* at the Adelphi in the February of 1830. Although the worst criminal in the piece is Blackburn (played by O. Smith), all the trouble is caused by the gentleman aptly named FitzHazard who forces Wilton, a deserter, to marry Emily, an heiress. Immediately after the wedding, Wilton is arrested and the scene changes to a realistic interior of Newgate. FitzHazard tricks the prison doctor, borrows his clothes and enables Wilton to escape with Blackburn. The victim, under Emily's influence, becomes a respectable mercer until his evil companions enter his shop with the demand for money, shel-

*The Scamps Of London; or, The Cross Roads Of Life*

Sadler's Wells 1843

ter and disguises, while hatching a plot against his neighbour. The last scene, near Cheapside, shows how London theatres dramatized city life without waiting for mysteries from Paris. "A street, with gas-lights, etc. leads down back of the stage; two streets, right and left, intersect it". Opposite a house with garden wall and practicable balcony is a public-house where honest tradesmen can be seen drinking in the bar while the two villains sit at table with Wilton upstairs. After a groom has brought out a chaise from the stable, Emily sings a warning. Thieves break in, police-rattles sound; Blackburn, intending to kill Wilton, stabs FitzHazard, who (making no allowance for a well-meant mistake) shoots his partner dead.

Barely two months after *Les Bohémiens De Paris* had begun its run at the Ambigu, Moncrieff came first in the English field of its followers with *The Scamps Of London; or, The Cross Roads Of Life* at Sadler's Wells in the November of 1843. Two years later Charles Selby turned it into the Strand's stirring spectacle, *London By Night*, which staged "A London Railway Terminus (exterior), the stage filled with passengers—newspaper boys calling out the

*London By Night*

Strand 1844

names of the newspaper—shoeblacks following their occupation vendors of fruit and cigar-lights—porters with luggage—railway and engine heard without”. Henry Marchmont appears among the crowd directing a porter, who carries his luggage on a truck. Henry has discovered that Louisa, whom he loved, has been betrayed to ruin, shame, dishonour. Frank, his brother, is to blame but “in spite of his faults, his crimes, I feel it is my duty not to abandon him in extremity”. Old Marchmont, before his death, arranged for Henry—who knows nothing of this—to marry the daughter of the wealthy banker Fairleigh, though neither of them has ever set eyes on him. Hawkhurst and Shabrier pass Frank off as the bridegroom-to-be on getting his signature to a bond for forty thousand pounds. The “scamps” are hoodwinked in a last act which was fairly conventional in the play as it was acted in the eighteen-forties. Its later history was more exciting.

## ACT XI. SCENE II

*“A cottage girl is as respectable as a queen”*

HISTORY, since it was taught in schools, was instructive. Since lessons were necessarily moral it was moral too; to doubt that would be almost as atheistical as to doubt the Old Testament. Historical dramas, especially if in blank verse, were highly moral and instructive in themselves, and authors who drove home their arguments in modern plays could put down the mallet when writing ancient ones. Biblical dramas were not done. There were no adaptations of these from the French. As Thackeray said, “The taste of such exhibitions, of course, every English person will question; but we must remember the manners of the people among whom they are popular”. History, including unadulterated fiction in costumes that pretended to be like those worn in the Middle Ages or earlier, was raised to a semi-sacred state where it took the place of events too hallowed for profane representation because taken from the history, not of the French or the English or the Romans—*The Last Days Of Pompeii* was in good taste even on the stage—but of the Jews. Sometimes the historical dramas of Victorian theatres had no moral tone whatever. But Buckstone’s *Abelard And Heloise*, played by “The company of the Theatre Royal Adelphi at the Surrey Theatre” in 1837, showed that this did not mean tolerance for the immoral. O. Smith, though cast for a pre-paid assassin, had such a heart of gold for the time being that he returned his fees and assassinated nobody. Sex never intrudes.

What supplied most of the power for the highly moral illumination of the stage was the discovery that (a) “The King upon his throne does not deserve more thanks for acting justly and honourably than does the humblest of mankind for doing the same thing” and (b) “A cottage girl, if she be an honest girl, is as respectable as a queen”, more especially (b). These sentiments are quoted from *Woman’s Love*; or, *Kate Wynsley*, *The Cottage Girl*,

*The Last Days Of Pompeii*

Adelphi 1835

written by Thomas Egerton Wilks for the Victoria in 1845. The author is remembered because he began to revise Grimaldi's memoirs before the task was taken over by Boz, but he has the additional merit of having picked two plots that later served for phenomenal best-sellers. His *Eily O'Connor* preceded *The Colleen Bawn*, and *Woman's Love* borrows the idea from La Chaussée of a wife who masquerades as governess of her own child, before that idea was half-exploited in *Jessy Vere* and fully exploited in *East Lynne*. Kate Wynsley, cottage girl, becomes the secret bride of the Earl of Castledale's heir before he sails for India. She follows, suffers first shipwreck and then imprisonment in France for six years. Finding on her return that he has come into the title and married again, she seeks employment in his house in order to watch over her child. After a long discussion her secret comes out, upon which news is brought to the Earl of Castledale that his second wife has just been drowned.

Usually the lowly-born heroine of highly-moral melodrama received unwelcome attentions. The Victoria presented in 1843—the year when all theatres were given freedom, not that it made

*Linda, The Pearl Of Savoy*

Royal Victoria 1843

much difference to present plays—*Linda, The Pearl Of Savoy*, taken from Denney by C. Z. Barnett. Colonel Boisfleury cries, “Ah, ha! I must throw them off their guard by my urbanity”, and drugs Linda’s wine. “She runs from him—He seizes her—she struggles—throws him R.H. corner—runs and seizes sword, and threatens him—he starts—they go round the stage—He seizes her, forces the sword from her. At that moment Andre enters.” But the wealthy are not always like that. When the Grecian in 1844 staged *The London Banker* by A. C. Campbell, the profligate’s opulent father says to a beggar, “Better that I should be seen supporting the weak footsteps of a female wanderer, than seated on a pile of wealth wrung from the pockets of the industrious million”, and he has no designs on her. Moral philosophy of a still higher order was attempted at the Haymarket in 1846. *The Round Of Wrong; or, A Fireside Story*, by Bayle Bernard, ends with, “Deeds have their orbits, and but fly off to return, and wrong its settled round, in which wander as it may, it ever comes back to its source!”

No London playwright laboured so industriously at driving



*The London Banker*

Grecian 1844

home morals during this vogue as George Dibdin Pitt. In an extraordinary mixture, he employed Gothic tricks of the trade for a temperance drama—*The Drunkard's Doom; or, The Last Nail* at the Coburg in the autumn of 1832. Adelich Starke, an intermediary between the old German legend of Peter Klaus and Washington Irving's Rip Van Winkle, puffs a magic pipe; its smoke fills the inn and clears to discover a hieroglyphic cavern where dwarf fiends are nailing coffins for drunkards. Dibdin Pitt wrote *Susan Hopley; or, The Vicissitudes Of A Servant Girl* for the Surrey in the spring of 1841. The heroine suffers not because she is under suspicion herself, but because her brother vanished on the night of a murder secretly committed by a wicked squire and a roué. She has learnt the truth in a dream. While she dozed over her work-basket, before a "flat" painted on gauze, the criminals were seen hiding his body behind the wainscot. In the end she confronts them in the room seen in her dream, where they are robbing an heiress under promise of marriage. Rescuers tear down a panel and the skeleton is revealed, clasping in his bony hand documentary proof of innocence. An equally enduring place in the repertory of stock companies was won by the same author's

*The Round Of Wrong*

Haymarket 1846

*The Beggar's Petition; or, A Father's Love And A Mother's Care*, first acted at the City in the October of 1841. Edgar, a baronet, makes Jane his mistress. After she has pressed a ring into her mother's hand, Sir Edgar orders the parents to be arrested for theft. "You have my fiat—marriage to-morrow, riches for your child, or beggary for both", he says to Jane, with the threat, "Declare that you gave it, and that instant you and your child are beggars". In Act III, the parents stand at her park gates when she enters at the side of Lady Carmine, laughing as she dismisses them with "Away, beggars, I know ye not". When Edgar orders a horsecloth to be given to the old man, Little Arthur tears it in half. "To him I give one half, the other I keep to give it to you when you are old and poor", he says so powerfully that his father eventually repents.

Few greater glories can be claimed by dramatized morals than the manufacture of a play out of family love. This was the achievement of Dennery (d'Ennery for Royalist and Imperial purposes). In collaboration with Marc Fourmier in 1850 he wrote *Paillasse*, which was acted at the Gaité, with Lemaître as the type

*The Drunkard's Doom*

Royal Victoria (Coberg) 1832

of clown whose name by this time meant Pierrot although originally it belonged to the type that acted parades, on balconies over theatre doors, in a costume striped like a paillasse. Guillaume Belphegor is a happy man, blessed in the love of Madeleine, his wife, and their children. A rogue, with stolen papers, identifies Madeleine as the daughter of the Marquis de Montbezou. She leaves her husband, not to take her rightful place in society but because Jeanne is ill and can be saved only in the warm south. Here, according to critical opinion of that generation, came moments which held the maximum emotion possible in the theatre. In the empty garret there is silence. It is broken by happy voices and the sound of feet on the stairs. Belphegor and his son come in laden with packages. "Keep quiet", says the father, "We won't call her until everything's ready", and they arrange their presents for Madeleine and Jeanne. Belphegor strikes an attitude. His son goes to call them, and comes back frightened because they are not there. Belphegor laughs as he sets out to look for their hiding-place, and comes back with a letter of farewell. In the end it is revealed that the rogue who identified Madeleine did so falsely for

reward. As *Belphegor The Mountebank; or, The Pride Of Birth*, this was at once adapted for the Adelphi with rival versions at the Surrey, the Victoria, and the City. Though regularly acted it became an almost proverbial example of the play which excites in the actors an enthusiasm not shared by the public. Perhaps Surreyside audiences were not as responsive to the "maximum of emotion possible in the theatre" as Paris audiences were when Thackeray declared that "vice is vice on the Boulevard". As a tyrant king roared out cruel sentences of death or a bereaved mother pleaded for the life of her child, "Ah, le gredin!" growled an indignant countryman, "Quel monstre!" said a grisette in a fury. "You see very fat old men crying like babies, sucking enormous sticks of barley-sugar." Anger, not pity, was what Cockneys liked to feel. If beer bottles were not chained to trays they were flung at actors, particularly Bill Sykes when he gazed up at the gallery in defiance after being called unmentionable things while dragging Nancy round the stage by her hair.

## ACT XI. SCENE III

*The Licensed Victualler's Daughter versus  
temperance*

THE day of Ranger, the rake *sans reproche* whom Garrick played with such grace that objection to raffishness had been overcome, was now ended. No one on the stage had a good word for gambling, and there were no two minds about seduction or even philandering. But Charles Surface was still exclaiming, "Fore heaven, 'tis true!—There's the great degeneracy of the age. Many of our acquaintances have taste, spirit, and politeness; but plague on't, they won't drink": there were two minds about that. Even the Minors could not always take the high moral tone against it. A curiously unsuccessful hack named J. P. Hart wrote for the Pavilion, Whitechapel, in 1840, a drama that seems

*Jane, The Licensed Victualler's Daughter*

Pavilion 1840

to have been subsidized by "The Trade". It was called *Jane, The Licensed Victualler's Daughter; or, The Orphan Of The Almshouses*, and labelled "Highly-Instructive and Moral". One character declared that "a respectably conducted tavern is one of the greatest blessings a nation can enjoy", and another that, "however the publicans of London may be reviled and abused, there is one act of theirs which will be admired and respected through all posterity—the foundation of The Licensed Victuallers' School—(Takes off his hat)—where religion, education, and comfort receive with open arms the victims of misfortune, and caresses in its bosom those little deserted flowers who might have been a prey to vice and misery!" Alfred, Mr Brewel's son, loves Jane, orphan from the L.V.S. who (to help a friend) pawned her dead father's watch (just before the pawnbroker's is burned down), which causes Mr Brewel to say, "Even if the article were her own, to obtain money in such a way betrays a want of delicacy". Snow is falling rapidly. The church clock chimes as if for a funeral. Jane falls exhausted in the snow. But the missing watch is found—and Jimmy Filer, a ship's engineer, brings the Jolly Jack Tar up—

*The Drunkard; or, The Fallen Saved*

Boston Museum 1844

to-date by saying "The steam of my affection is up", and "Cupid has fastened his shaft into my crank wheel".

Hart's dramas were not wanted on the conservative Surrey side, nor were the times apt for special pleading on behalf of drunkenness. Actors had good reason to know the horrors of this scourge, which killed off many of their number like a plague—especially in the eighteen-thirties when young Grimaldi, Henry Kemble, Elliston, and Edmund Kean perished. Unconscious humour could no more be discerned in melodrama's denunciations of drink than in Dickens' story of death in delirium tremens. The very drunkards of the Bowery and the New Cut would roar their approval of a hero's speeches in favour of temperance. At a time when every man, woman, and child saw human wreckage staggering from pillar to post and falling with a crash of skull on pavements, audiences responded with feeling to the appeal of drink dramas.

There was in America a hard-drinking actor named W. H. Smith who signed the pledge of total abstinence and wished to play the part he had so well rehearsed in real life. *The Drunkard; or, The Fallen Saved*, written for him by some unknown hack, was

*Aunt Dinah's Pledge*

Howard Athenæum, Boston 1853

"adapted" by him to make speeches and situations stronger. Perhaps no more theatrical play exists in print, and Smith spared his body no less than his brains for he bruised himself nightly in the delirium tremens scene. *The Bottle*, a drama founded by T. P. Taylor upon "the graphic illustrations of George Cruikshank", was staged at the City in 1847. There are eight tableaux leading from "The Happy Home" by way of "He is Discharged For Drunkenness", "The Dead Child", and "The Quarrel", to "The Madhouse" where the inebriate dies in terror. Harry Seymour's *Aunt Dinah's Pledge*, at the Howard Athenæum, Boston, in 1853, gilded the pill by including in its cast T. D. Rice, the singer of "Jump Jim Crow", who began the craze for nigger minstrels. Seymour, a thorough reformer, turned his play into a tract against drink and tobacco, and in favour of the negro. The most noteworthy of drink dramas, William W. Pratt's *Ten Nights In A Bar-Room*, opened at the National, New York, in 1858. It tells the history of the Sickie & Sheaf, Cedarville. At first Morgan, the village drunkard, is the sole outward cause of trouble. When a glass is thrown at him it strikes his little daughter, Mary, and

*Ten Nights In A Bar-Room*

National, New York 1858

while she is dying he sees a huge snake twining itself round his arm and he clings to her for protection from bright shapes with glaring eyes. He reforms to become Cedarville's mayor, and disaster overcomes the Sickle & Sheaf, though crime is enlivened by a comic barman who sings a temperance ballad to the tune of "Yankee Doodle". There is a scuffle between the publican and his son. "Frank throws him off and hits him on the head with the trick bottle. Slade falls, L.C. Frank appalled—Music." As the century advanced the theatrical style changed, but travelling magic-lantern shows included drink dramas more scarlet than any shown on stage or screen, even in "glorious technicolour" to-day.



## ACT XII. SCENE I

*Napoleon's mistress, the Woman of Destiny*

IF England ever thoroughly deserved a bad name for hypocrisy it was in the eighteen-forties at the time of Thackeray's visit to Paris. He wrote in the belief that piety was native to England and profligacy to France. As a critic he could have put this to the literary test. When London had enjoyed a lifetime of those licentious plays which are labelled "Restoration" to make the period of their existence sound shorter, reproofs from abroad set the fashion in virtue from abroad. During the period when the French theatre stiffened into rigid respectability, the English rake swaggered back to favour until the Regency shocked the good people of Paris. And with reason, because it was a Regency poet who set the bad people of Paris an example of splendid vice. They gave us Maintenon. In return we gave them Byron.

The literary test, like the scientific test and the test of personal experience, opposes the view of the Frenchman as a being with glands different from ours. The theatrical evidence tentatively suggests that the Romantic Drama of France was the product, like the Restoration Drama of England, of an uneven tenor of life. In itself the career of Mademoiselle George almost proves this to be so for it was the effect of political bouleversements and the cause of dramatic upheavals. As a child in years but a woman in figure, she played classic rôles at the Théâtre Français. The First Consul made her his mistress until he decided to crown himself Emperor. She went to the French theatre at St. Petersburg until 1812, then returned and let it be known that her heart had not changed. For a time she was out of favour, but as reverence grew for the Man, so it did for the Mistress. Charles Harel, a prefect during the Hundred Days, became her new lover. He was so young, ardent and eager for Romance that inexperience was no bar to his

theatrical ambitions. Returning with her to Paris, he became, no one knew how, director of the Odeon. She at forty-two had a form that was exuberantly beautiful to the poets of Romance and dominated the stage in their lurid chapters of the past. As she was not a simpering maiden either in reputation or appearance, their ideas, so Harel tactfully dictated, had to mature accordingly. Hence the mania for queens of splendid vice. The Romantic Drama, whose poets found in her the glass of fashion and mould of form, took shape at her supper table.

When the season at the Odeon ended in a financial disaster they went to the Porte-Saint-Martin. To offset failures there were performances that aroused, says Mantzius, "a jubilation and enthusiasm, a passion, sometimes a horror, such as we in these days have never known in a theatre and find it difficult to understand". Comfortable, secure, self-assured burghers from the right little island with a young queen upon the throne to inspire melodrama's father-towards-daughter hallowed feelings were bound to stand aghast at rugissements et bondissements, bacchanate et saturnale, galop infernal, ronde du sabbat, tout le tremblement. Roughly speaking, that was what Thackeray beheld. "When I think over the number of crimes that I have seen Mademoiselle George, for instance, commit, I am filled with wonder at her greatness, and the greatness of the poets who have conceived these charming horrors for her. I have seen her make love to, and murder, her sons, in *La Tour De Nesle*. I have seen her poison a company of no less than nine gentlemen, at Ferrara, with an affectionate son in the number; I have seen her, as Madame de Brinvilliers, kill off numbers of respectable relatives in the first four acts; and, at the last, be actually burned at the stake, to which she comes shuddering, ghastly, barefooted, and in a white sheet".

After witnessing most of the grand dramas produced at Paris for half-a-dozen years, and thinking over all that he had seen—the fictitious murders, rapes, adulteries, and other crimes by which he had been interested and excited—Thackeray thought a man might take leave to be heartily ashamed of the manner in which he had spent his time and of "the hideous kind of mental intoxication in which he has permitted himself to indulge". To him la

femme fatale was new. Yet nobody living in the world as we know it invented her. She was before Cleopatra, before Delilah; she may have been Lilith if we could be sure who Lilith was. Yet the femme fatale was sprung upon the unsuspecting nineteenth century like a novelty; and such she was to a public that had been long brooding over straying wives and lost daughters. How she came into being depends, pedagogues would say, on what you mean by fatal. Is she a woman charged with fate, bringing down upon the head of her lovers the doom of irrevocable destiny, or is she merely the agent of death like some accident or injury? Either way a mild claim could be made out for a certain Bianca, wife to Fazio, who being consumed with jealousy betrayed her husband; when he had been condemned to death for aiding in the murder of a miser whose money he stole, she repented too late and died of a broken heart. The report of this in the "Annual Register" for 1795 moved an undergraduate at Oxford to write a tragedy. It was published in 1816, acted as *The Italian Wife* at the Surrey without his knowledge in 1816, and acted as *Fazio* at Covent Garden amid general approval in 1818. These events have been well remembered because the author became widely known as Dean Milman.

But for power of fatality this Bianca could not hold the light of Lady Macbeth to Marguerite, the dissolute queen of Henry of Navarre. She inspired Dumas to write *La Tour De Nesle* which was staged in 1832 and turned into *The Tower Of Nesle; or, The Chamber Of Death* for the Surrey some few months afterwards. The English production is important for the public attitude it shows. If Monk Lewis had handled such a story there would have been an outcry, but now—largely through the influence of Scott—what was not permissible as romance could be approved as "An Historical Drama" because history was naturally educational and edifying and could not help dabbling in sins that were normally unmentionable. Sadistic incest, for this reason, got past the censor. The slashed bodies of three handsome youths are taken from the Seine beneath the Tower of Nesle regularly every morning—the end of a night of bliss. In girlhood the queen had given birth to twin sons and now they and their father find them-

selves in the tower. One of the twins is taken dead from the Seine, the other comes fresh from the assassins' knives to be greeted by the newly enlightened queen with, "Wretched youth, I am thy mother". The play may not properly belong here: you cannot very well call an abattoir fatal.

The origin of a type that was to overwhelm the drama is indicated by Victor Hugo, whose *Marion De Lorme* not only presented a courtesan as chief character, but also sign-posted future playwrights to the treasure trove that awaited them in the royal mistresses of France. What attracts women to the theatre, said Hugo, is passion; they are absorbed in the development of emotion; they want tragedy which analyses passion. Perhaps this accounts for the popularity on the Paris stage, no matter what contemporary reasons are given, of the *infâme ravisseur*. Thackeray thought otherwise under melodrama's sway. The seducer, the rascal of the piece, was always a noble. "The aristocracy is dead now, but the theatre lives upon traditions and don't let me be too scornful at such legends as are handed down by the people from race to race. Vulgar prejudice against the great it may be, but prejudice against the great is only a rude expression of sympathy with the poor: long, therefore, may fat *épiciers* blubber over mimic woes, and honest *prolétaires* shake their fists, shouting 'Gredin, scélérat, monstre de marquis!' and such republican cries." Though the development of the *infâme ravisseur* is traced in the Continental vogues of Mrs Radcliffe and Mrs Opie, reality has something to do with it.

The mistress of the Man of Destiny was the Woman of Fate. All others, though not to be dismissed as imposters or imitators, have no authentic claims. They signify in somewhat different ways this desire to paint sin larger than life and are too much given to suffering. La femme fatale should, like the fatal dagger or the fatal bowl of poison, not be killed but kill. The others take their title from the contemporary epigram:

A croire ces messieurs, on ne voit dans nos rues,  
Que les enfants trouvés et les femmes perdues,

yet they belong to the tradition and somehow the aroma of bitter almonds lingers about their names. Deadly nightshade is the

*Mary Glastonbury*

An English drama of somnambulism

emblem of them all, though for the first of them fate spelt "something with boiling oil in it", a fearful business that fermented itself in the mind of Scribe unaided. Usually he worked in double harness with nonentities whom he respected as deputies of the great public. By this means he regularly gave ear to what the public wanted before he gave tongue. Insignificant in himself he is, as the voice of each season, always significant, recommending revolutions in 1828 and ridiculing them (in *Le Fils De Cromwell; ou, Une Restauration*) in 1842. Some account of his labours must be introduced here before we come to *La Juive*.

The whole life of Eugene Scribe can be told in three words. He wrote plays. He began in his teens, had the first accepted when he was twenty and went on continually till he died. The French stage was in a peculiar state, a queer compromise between freedom and monopoly. So many theatres had been built when every citizen had the right to become a manager that they could not all be closed. On the other hand, the restored Royalists were determined to exercise royal prerogatives. They did so by allowing each theatre to present one type of performance only—drama at the Théâtre Français, opera at the Opéra, opera comique at the Opéra-Comique, melodrama at the Porte-Saint-Martin, and vaudevilles at the Vaudeville, Gymnase, Variétés and Théâtre de

Madame. As Scribe gained his footing at the Vaudeville, he wrote vaudevilles. He wrote them from 1811 until 1832 at the rate, midway through this period, of a dozen a year. The plot he had in mind might be suitable for comedy or melodrama, but as it might not be acceptable in that form he made a vaudeville of it first—an opera of it later when he was in favour at the Opéra. And a piece that had undergone this metamorphosis might, in spirit, be plain straightforward melodrama. *La Sonnambule*, written by him as a vaudeville in 1819 became the ballet-pantomime of *La Sonnambule*; *ou, L'Arrive D'Un Nouveau Seigneur* at the Opéra in 1827. Moncrieff wrote *The Sonnambulist*; or, *The Phantom Of The Village* for Covent Garden in 1828. What is chiefly remarkable in the story is a seigneur so chivalrous and honourable that when the heroine sleep-walks into his bedroom, he opens the window and soliloquizes, "The moon shines brightly and will light me to my Château. Poor Ernestine! Your misfortune makes this chamber the temple of purity". Ernestine, misjudged by the entire village, vindicates her innocence by sleep-walking perilously from a garret-window along the gutter to the awning of the mill-wheel which turns rapidly round. Bellini's opera, *La Sonnambula*, began its career at Milan, London, and Paris in 1831.

Scribe's opera of *Robert Le Diable* was famous for its scene of a ruined cloister where nuns, damned for their sins, lie beneath their likenesses in stone which come to life, throw off their robes, take up cups and dice, flagon and glass, pay respect to an image of Satan and dance a bacchanalian orgy. In 1835, still at the Opéra, he wrote *La Juive*, whose heroine is condemned to a horrible death. Her father knows a secret. There was a time when the Cardinal had a wife and daughter, and that daughter still lives. The Jew is mercilessly tortured, but will not speak. His own daughter is flung into boiling oil. Now, at last, his twisted lips part. Pointing to the cauldron he croaks, "Your daughter is there".

As the crowning triumph of his career Scribe was set the task of imagining a femme fatale for Rachel, the tigress Jewess, conqueror of Beauty and Grace whom she had "bound both at her side"; the old-clo' man's daughter, street singer, who had "something

neither of man nor of woman; in each of her eyes sat a devil". Legouv  , his partner, has described how *Adrienne Lecouvreur* went into rehearsal. "From the start the sound of her voice stirred my heart. She had never been so naturally, effortlessly tragic. Flickering light from the little smoking lamp made black shadows pass across her dead-white face. These were startling enough but in that vast empty auditorium the resonance of her tones startled me. It was as though we were in death." In the green room she saw how pale everyone had grown. "It is not for Adrienne that I have been weeping", she said, "but for myself. I know now I shall die young", with a sudden presentiment of the moment, not far off, when she would cry for help, "Oh save me, save me from death".

To-day we have left of these soul-stirrings nothing but three acts of portentous "preparation". Maurice de Saxe, loved by a princess, loves and is loved by Adrienne, who quotes masses of classical Alexandrines out of jealousy in Act IV. Then in Act V, the princess, stealing the bouquet sent by Adrienne to Maurice, poisons the flowers and has them returned to Adrienne, who kisses them and dies happily because Maurice is there to propose marriage to her. Surely there was no more "fatality" here than in the classics. What the public saw as a great metamorphosis from classic tragedy to romance was nothing more to Rachel than a change of costume.

## ACT XII. SCENE II

*The theatre of Dumas P  re on the Boulevard  
du Crime*

AT the time of Fieschi's Infernal Machine, the Boulevard du Crime still made history. From a window opposite the pleasure gardens of the Caf   Turc twenty-five heavily-charged barrels, fired by a train of gunpowder at the royal pro-

cession of 1835, killed women and children as well as soldiers. The outrage violently indicated what was called political unrest. Yet throughout Louis-Philippe's unpopular reign, the Boulevard was a playground, from one year's end to the other, whose like the world has never seen. That broad thoroughfare, lined with trees, was crowded from early morning until the small hours. Groups of little theatres jostled close together, Franconi's and the Gaîté dominant, in the midst of cafés with rows of awnings. Fires had caused some change and the rebuilt Ambigu had moved nearer to the Porte-Saint-Martin, thus enlarging melodrama's empire. The same territory served for the Romantic Revival, which with all its passion and poetry amounted to the same thing—crime. Each may have had separate audiences, one avid for virtue and the other for sin, but all playgoers were lost in one vast crowd. There the gypsies of society mingled with the gypsies of art so that any reference to les Bohémiens de Paris might now mean either. Béranger sang of "gais Bohémiens". Henri Mürger, a writer of vaudevilles for the Boulevard, published "Scènes de la Vie de Bohême" in 1848, which became *La Vie De Bohême* at the Variétés a year later. This finally robbed pickpockets of their name and gave it to poets and painters. That period, particularly when it was being hastened to its close, had a rare, a particular, glamour. While its politics have become the dry facts of a struggle between Royalists and Republicans, there is still a warm feeling in records of its war between Classicism and Romanticism.

In popular imagination the new spirit was personified by Dumas, the life and soul of cloak-and-sword melodrama that was always at Court. From the royal family he received a special privilege to pull down an old hotel at one end of the Boulevard's row of theatres and build there the Théâtre Historique. It opened in 1847. Twenty-four hours before the curtain was to rise on *La Reine Margot*, a crowd gathered at its doors. Some brought straw with them in order to spend the night in comfort. Others made a fête of it with part-singing by lantern-light. Dumas' drama of Henry of Navarre lasted eight hours. Its success, acknowledged by *La Reine Argot* at the Folies-Dramatiques, continued for three months. This was the beginning of a feast which eventually



proved more than enough for the hungriest of appetites for Dumas. Only one play at the Historique in 1847 was entirely by another hand, but this did not change the look of the affiches as much as might have been expected, because the name of the author (no relation) happened to be Adolphe Dumas. In the February of 1848 *Monte Cristo, Part I* and *Monte Cristo, Part II* were played on alternate nights. But this was no time for play-going. Paris was in so great a ferment that the company of the Historique left for London; when they appeared at Drury Lane in *Monte Cristo*, riots broke out in protest against foreigners. The plight of these players deserved sympathy. In Paris the Red Republicans, behind hundreds of barricades, were firing upon the National Guard. Fighting was most severe in the neighbourhood of the Boulevard, for the Faubourg du Temple was the insurgents' stronghold. There they held out till the end of June, when cannon fire forced their surrender after the dead were to be counted in thousands.

The city was still in a state of siege when the Historique reopened in July. More Dumas, new or old, rang the changes until the public was so surfeited that a very strong play, based on one of his novels, was received without the least enthusiasm. *Pauline*, by Grangé and de Montépin, displayed Fechter as the most admirable of villains in the style of crime exultant. Here is one of the few instances where a play which did not please warrants close attention in a history whose subject might be called "What the Public Wants". Why this should not have been wanted is puzzling, but those were difficult times: a republic with an Imperial president was even more unsettling than any of the unsettling régimes which had gone before. Another factor is that splendid vice was due to go out of fashion and be replaced by that pudibondetie which was steadfast in the French character (as Beaumarchais had seen) although supposed to be peculiarly English. Count Horace de Beuzeval, a cut-throat of exquisite manners, noble birth, heroic courage, and princely munificence, brings Pauline, his bride, to his château, adjoining the Abbey de Grandpré. When she touches a secret spring a staircase leads her to a vault where de Beuzeval is at table with Max and Henri, all

dressed in peasants' blouses and armed with knives and pistols. On a couch in the corner her friend, Harriet, lies bound. Henri claims her because he killed her husband. Max has a moral claim. They appeal to their leader who tells them, "You've ten minutes to make love to the beauty. So get to work, my Don Juans". When they start fighting for her he takes up a pistol and shoots her. Her death cry is echoed by another piercing shriek. As a door is flung open Pauline falls down in a faint. "We are betrayed", cries Henri. "Fear nothing, gentlemen, I will take charge of her", says the Bluebeard of 1850, and she regains consciousness to find herself buried alive in a dungeon. There is a glass of poison beside a letter which promises her instant and painless death; she drinks just at the moment that her cousin, Lucien, breaks the grating of her prison. She is still dying a year later when de Beuzeval is about to marry her cousin, Gabrielle. Lucien lays two pistols, one loaded and one unloaded, under the cloth upon the table. He and his enemy take up the weapons and fire; de Beuzeval falls.

By now the Historique was doomed. Its repertoire was so thoroughly dominated by plays either by Dumas or taken from novels by Dumas that monotony had become incurable. There were quarrels, and Hostein, nominally the director, left the presiding genius to his fate and began a prosperous career as director of the Gaîté, oldest theatre of the Boulevard. Paris was, admittedly, in a very difficult mood. It had no "movement" in 1850. Romance had faded. Sin had lost its excitement. Virtue triumphed again, but without any sense of novelty. That accounts for the success in early spring of a melodrama which was almost neutral about morals. *Le Courrier De Lyon*, by Moteau, Siraudin, and Delacour, was founded on the facts of a miscarriage of justice. Towards the close of the eighteenth century the guard of the Lyons malle post had been killed and robbed at a roadside inn. The murderer, an escaped galley slave, fastened the guilt upon a citizen who was his double—turned by fiction into the innkeeper's son, who had been tricked into behaving after a fashion that caused his own father to accuse him of the crime. One play had already been made from the story. Now to noise abroad the prisoner's innocence—called in question by Professor Oman's book on

the subject in 1946—his family authorized the use of his real name, Joseph Lesurques. Both he and the criminal, Dubosc, were represented by Lacressonnière, an actor of elegant and distinguished appearance whom Dumas had so often cast for aristocrats that he had been kept from the lead. In *Le Courrier De Lyon* at the Gaîté he at last became the star, only to have the play stolen from him by the drollery of Paulin Menier, whose alcoholic voice and “nez rubescent” warmed the hearts of playgoers for half a century towards Choppard, dit L’Aimable, the horse-dealer who assists Dubosc. The play ended happily one night and unhappily the next throughout the run.

Five months later the Historique enjoyed its last experience of popular favour. This was because of a melodrama in which, similarly, two leading parts were doubled. *Les Frères Corses*, Dumas dramatized once more by Grangé and de Montépin, was played with Fechter as Fabien and Louis dei Franchi, Siamese twins still so united in thought and feeling though the surgeon’s knife separated them, that when one is killed in a duel far away, the other immediately sets out to avenge him—a true romance this, with a ghost who demands blood in the Elizabethan manner.

There were other dramas by Dumas to follow, but in the autumn the players in his *Paul Jones* refused to appear because they had not been paid. After a solitary performance to benefit themselves and other employees, they brought the four years of cloak-and-sword to a close. That their audiences had been gorged is clear. Yet even with less than enough of that feast their taste would have changed. Politics were again swaying popular imagination. There was at last an awakening from the hypnotic spell of Napoleon’s vanished glory. Both Hugo and Dumas were the sons of generals whose authority with the sword was inherited as authority with the pen. It was not by chance that the two dramatists drew their inspiration from the past. Nor is it strange that the sense of might in their historical plays evaporated in translation. That lifeless solemnity which characterizes history in contemporary English plays imparted itself to versions of what were stirring romances in Paris. The French gaze, seemingly intent on piercing the future, was in reality turned backwards.

Public entertainments reveal how obsessed it was with remembrance of Napoleon. The dream did not pass until his nephew was elected President in 1848 by an overwhelming majority. Now the past was intruding into the present. The coup d'état dissolved the legislative assembly. Again the streets of Paris ran blood. The prince-president was declared emperor in 1852 and assumed the title of Napoleon III. Meanwhile there had occurred the birth of what was called Realism.

ACT XII. SCENE III

*La Dame Aux Camélias, Le Demi-Monde and  
Froufrou*

EACH change in the nineteenth century from one kind of realism to another was a matter of morals. Each taught "The wages of sin is death". Since all were agreed on this the wonder is that their earnestness could have been of such different kinds. The war between vice and virtue was always far less fierce than disputes between respectability (virtue so triumphant as to be shocked when told about the existence of vice) and the naked truth. Allowances could be made for sinners who confessed, and even for those who boasted, but not for militant moralists who wished to discuss the seventh commandment, not because their flesh was weak but because their minds were given to prurient curiosity. What was seemly was more important than what was righteous. Which meant that while *la femme fatale* might behave as she pleased in remote existences, she was not fit company for the contemporary world.

Here, of course, was a rising playwright's opportunity. The younger Dumas saw that the public could be shocked, and since he had been thrown into "very mixed society" at a very early age, he knew how to shock it. At twenty-four he published his

novel "La Dame aux Camélias", then wrote the stage version a year later. Theatre after theatre rejected it, and when the Vaudeville was willing the censorship was not. The Minister of Public Instruction banned it as an "apology for vice" until compelled by historic events to change his mind. After the bloodshed of December 1851, the government preferred disputes about plays to disputes about politics and *La Dame Aux Camélias* opened at the Vaudeville two months later. Desirée Doche created the spirituelle strumpet who renounces her lover (played by Fechter) at his father's appeal, suffers insults and poverty and knows no happiness until one moment of understanding when she is at the point of death. Consumption is one thing that kills her; another is the need of a human sacrifice in order that virtue, though not personified, may still triumph. Why were there protests from critics who had suffered the survival of the erring wife in *The Stranger*, besides gazing admiringly at Rachel in *Phèdre* and at George in *La Tour De Nesle*? The offence was that the style of Dumas fils was so much nearer real life. Most playgoers were so well satisfied with the change that the play, says the author, "began to free me from the slavery of debt and of the society to which I owed both the debt and the success".

Accepting the moral conventions of his day whole-heartedly he turned against old companions who were not respectable. In *Le Demi-Monde* at the Gymnase in 1855 he held up for public sympathy le honnête homme, intended victim of la femme fatale. *Le Demi-Monde* gives to every honnête homme the divine right of le roi soleil. Oliver, determined never to marry, finds life agreeable in the demi-monde—a modern thing, he explains, because in other days "adultery as we understand it did not exist". Betrayed husbands, no longer cuckolds as in Molière's day, now had the right to cast out faithless wives. What became of such creatures? The first sought in shame a quiet retreat. The second joined the first so that they could console and excuse one another. Others came until they formed an unconventional society which functioned conventionally. Suzanne, enriched and tutored by an honnête marquis, is its brightest ornament. She proposes to marry Raymond, a young soldier from North Africa. To open his eyes

Oliver openly insults the demi-monde even to the girl who is there through no fault of her own. Suzanne is too clever for him. Raymond, put in the wrong, breaks down with the cry of, "You are making a man weep who has not wept since the death of his mother. Thank you, tears are good". There is a duel. Oliver comes with the news that he has killed Raymond and with impassioned eloquence persuades Suzanne to fly with him. When she agrees, Raymond enters safe and sound. That marriage, says Oliver, has been prevented by reason, by justice, by the law of society which holds that "un honnête homme n'épouse qu'une honnête femme", and when he has at last finished moralizing Raymond calls him, "le plus honnête homme que je connaisse".

Partly through showmanship, partly through hysteria, and partly through his zest for mentioning the (then) unmentionable, the younger Dumas had demonstrated the logical outcome of fashionable virtue in theory and practice—*reductio ad absurdum*. Did anyone then see it in this light? Could anybody see it in any other light now? *Le Demi-Monde* is two plays. One can only be performed before the inward eye when the playgoer has first adopted the nineteenth-century bias, no easy matter since he must accept the author's morals while protesting against his immorality in expressing them. The other play is the satire created by the twentieth-century bias naturally and unavoidably. The mere recurrence of "honnête homme" has become ironic. The plaintive hints that he represents virtue in distress are, no matter whether there may be something in the idea, plain fun. The character of Oliver has undergone, if only because moralizing is no longer tolerated on the stage, a thorough metamorphosis from hero to prig; and in the theatre, where our outlook is never the same as in real life, nobody can feel concern over the fate of Raymond. What the modern mind forgets is the rigidity of social laws in the code of virtue triumphant. "Adultery as we understand it did not exist" becomes a sinister phrase when spoken in that setting.

The desire to be a moralist, a teacher, a leader of the people overcame the young playwright. As far as morals go, says Brander Matthews in his admirable "French Dramatists of the 19th

Century", Dumas fils might be called a "self-made man". In all his later plays, according to this critic, the viciousness of vice and the virtuousness of virtue are mentioned in every third line; unfortunately his taste has not always improved with his morals, and the other two lines offend more than the one line benefits. A French critic "grasped the moral in these plays and always came out the worse for it". That such comments were deserved is proved by the moral which accompanied his exhibitions of *la femme fatale*. Brander Matthews saw Valentine de Santis of *La Demi-Monde* as the first sketch and the Countess of Terremonde of the *Princess Georges* as a half-length. The figure reappears full-length in the Iza of the *Affaire Clémenceau* (the novel by Dumas which others dramatized) and in the Cesarine of the *Femme De Claude*. "Both of these are creatures governed wholly by animal wants and instincts; in other words, they are irresponsible brutes: and in each case the husband exercises the right of individual justice, and puts her out of the world." In the sociological pamphlet, "L'Homme-Femme", published in 1872, Dumas dissected the same female phenomenon and came to the same conclusion, formulated in the phrase, "Tue-la!"—"Kill her".

In order to attach an epilogue some years must be skipped. Paris under the Second Empire found its perfect expression in opéra-bouffe, by Offenbach with libretti by Meilhac and Halévy. At the Gymnase in 1869 these two humorists suddenly turned serious at *la femme fatale's* expense in their drama, soon world-famous, called *Froufrou*—translated into English as *Frou-Frou*—to express "a rustling flutter of silken skirts, sweeping along like a whirlwind". It is the nickname of Gilberte who attracts the wordly Valreas, and is not sufficiently repelled by his compliments:

*Valreas*: The skirt of your habit just fluttered aside, the least little bit in the world, and I saw such a pretty, tiny, little foot.

*Gilberte*: You say that you—

*Valreas*: I say that you have a dainty little foot; and I'm quite right. Look! (he looks down at Gilberte's foot, which just shows beyond the hem of her riding skirt).

*Gilberte*: Ah! (she draws in her foot).

She marries Henry de Sartorys. As an amateur she is to play Cleopatra to the Mark Antony of Valreas in opéra-bouffe. She persuades her sister Louise to live with her in order to look after Henri and their child. There is a quarrel, and she elopes with Valreas to Venice. Sartorys, who arrives, pale and haggard, to give her back her marriage portion, kills Valreas in a duel. In the last act, Froufrou comes home in a common black dress to die and ask to be buried in a white robe covered all over with roses.

By then the Boulevard du Crime had been destroyed. Politics were to blame. Baron Hausmann's new thoroughfares did away with its theatres. New ones answering to the old names had to be built elsewhere because it was deemed advisable that the night life of Paris should be spread over a wide area. Ancient traditions were continued by the Ambigu, which had moved away in good time. There Lemaître appeared as fathers in search of lost daughters—in one play a locksmith rescued his from a room made of steel like a huge safe, and in another a marchand de coco, Boulevard type, let his *sonnette* be heard by the heroine whenever seducer drew near—though by then Sue's Grand Duchy of Gerolstein had become just one of Offenbach's little jokes.



## ACT XIII. SCENE I

*Social gulf between ballet and drama*

NOT theatrical but social history explains why scenes that were romance on the Paris stage changed, on crossing the Channel, into spectacles whose interest was of a somewhat different nature. Dramas, mélodrames and semi-classic tragédie, taken from playwrights and playhouses singularly diverse, became in London a Gallic Drama less significant of literary taste than of class consciousness. Nobody can understand what was happening to the stage in the early years of Victoria's reign without reference to what was happening off it, for in their own quiet way her subjects were putting their house in order against any fresh disturbance from Chartists, with a thoroughness that altered everything. There was as much change on one side of the Channel as on the other. France had several swift revolutions. England moved slowly round once.

As the clamour swelled for political reform English burghers found their sympathies mixed. Because they could side neither with the Duke of Wellington nor the riotous "operatives", they could no longer range themselves on one side or the other of a dividing line between aristocracy and democracy. They saw themselves as a middle-class, the first effect of which was to separate social extremes as never before. The rich were parted by this solid public from the poor, and how wide this kept the two apart can be clearly seen in their distinctive entertainments now that the old fairground equality, so marked in Pepys' day, had vanished. Ugly realities were represented in the factory dramas of the Surrey-side. Enchanting unrealities were set before the array of sartorial splendours at London's one fashionable theatre. Where Pall Mall and Haymarket met, Regency stucco had raised its greatest triumph, formerly the King's now Her Majesty's or the

Royal Italian Opera. Nothing in London's pleasure haunts could equal it either in size—its barn-like roof shared London's skyline with St. Paul's—or grandeur. Around the gleaming mass of flat surfaces, painted white, ran a broad balcony's balustrade. Below this at each corner were arched piazzas and at each side rows of tall classic columns. At night the soft golden glow of the lamplit colonnade attracted carriages like swarms of moths. The vast gold-and-silver horseshoe of boxes inside had the stage brought forward into the midst of them so that their splendid occupants, flanking the singers, seemed part of the performance. Next to the orchestra, rows of stalls were occupied by old Regency bucks with opera glasses who were, like the box-holders, free to lounge in the Green Room. Stage fever never ran such a temperature elsewhere. When Rubins came back to appear in all the magnificence of an opera villager as the hero in *La Sonnambula*, "Bouquets were at once in requisition, flying from every direction to the feet of the primo tenore, who picked them up and bowed, and bowed and picked them up, while Persiani, who was Amina, assisted him in collecting his glories, and forced into his hand an immense bunch of flowers".

Full evening dress was compulsory everywhere except in the gallery, which was occupied, according to a tradition as old as the Restoration, by servants. The parterre was a grand rout. Not until Victoria's reign did knee-breeches, silk-stockings, cocked-hats and dress-swords vanish. Then appeared, amid the dazzling bare shoulders, black glossy top hats, swung aloft in formidable admiration, by wearers of tights. When trousers became permissible, military uniforms, scarlet of the Guards, black or bottle-green of the Rifles, were prominent until the Duke of Wellington forbade them at civilian ceremonial because riots had made the Army unpopular. Through the parterre ran a broad gangway known as Fops' Alley because here, in the interval, the last of the dandies would stand while endeavouring to catch the eye of beauty in the boxes. Night after night at the beginning of her reign the young queen would be there. Protests were published against the bestowal of royal favour upon foreigners. Still she came. More protests appeared. She attended as regularly as before. At the end

of the season a purple-faced editor calculated that she had witnessed thirty-three performances out of thirty-nine and had been absent only when Assemblies necessitated her presence at the Palace. No other setting was more suited to a form like a Sylphide in repose than this mist of lace shawls, silk crinolines, and diamond tiaras, set off by masculine faces, entirely surrounded by manes of curls like pantomime lions (they liked to describe each others' heads as "leonine"). All was ordered in the manner of a private crush. Outside liveried footmen, called "tigers" because frogged with yellow stripes, craned their necks in order to be ready with the doors of crested carriages. The linkman signalled for the taking up and setting down in the widest and best-lit thoroughfares of the metropolis, while at the stage-door pink-faced ensigns vied with grandfathers in escorting to their landaulettes the reigning favourites of enchanted nights.

Elsewhere opera in English was melodrama stuffed, like the old Surrey burlettas, with song. Here at Her Majesty's it meant the magic of diva and ballerina. Ballet and opera were wedded to create magic too evanescent for history to record anything but dry facts. Taglioni's *Sylphide* was of matchless beauty. Yet Elssler was dancer and actress too, as the girl who pretended to be frenzied by the bite of a tarantula. When Taglioni, Carlotta Grisi, Cerito and Lucille Grahn appeared together in the *Grand Pas de Quatre*, accounts reached foreign courts in diplomatic despatches. In Victorian lithographs the airs and graces of the ballet à la Taglioni linger yet. No further evidence is needed of the spell under which its audiences lay. Elderly bucks who wandered from the stalls to the Green Room and back again thought, like Mr Pip's Viscount, "What is the legitimate object of the drama, Pip? Human nature. What are legs? Human nature. Then let us have plenty of leg pieces". Fortunes were bestowed on the prima ballerina who would allow amorous old beaux to wait on her with shawls and perfume. Scandals were commonplace. There was a general belief, founded on some measure of fact, that the figurantes of Her Majesty's and a whole corps of English lords were actively engaged in sin. Melodrama's convention of a lascivious baronet-age should rather be traced to the Green Room of the Opera than

to the Court of Louis XVI, and contemporary French notions of wickedness among our old nobility were refreshed by the way Noblet was attended in Paris by Lord Fife. During the Regency the maître de ballet, Armand Vestris, had launched his lovely young wife as a singer and then left her to float alone. Madame Vestris retained throughout her career both the glamour and the notoriety she gained then. Either one or both brought a lesser world of aristocracy to her doors when she set up in management amid the slums of Drury Lane at the Olympic.

The New Police, on their beats in the area of coal-gas lighting, began the vogue of class-conscious drama. Security was encouraging respectable people to go out at nights even to the Theatres Royal in their maze of back streets; managers, from Vestris down to Vincent Crummies, advertised, "And the Performances will always finish by Eleven o'clock so as Families may be induced to support the Theatre". Tradition stoutly maintained that theatre-land proper was the Temple Bar end of Drury Lane; and nothing, not even the Kingdom's worst smells or stealthiest fingers in narrow alleys, stopped the building and rebuilding of theatres there. The City had a vast population of people whose craving for amusement had been thwarted of old by the City Fathers and now by the prohibitive cost of land, and into any gaiety offered at its gates would pour the westering flood of hungry souls every weekday evening. Madame Vestris did more: she drew society eastwards to get its carriages jammed in narrow Wych Street. To suit such playgoers she removed the front benches of the pit to make way for opera stalls, and divided the lowest balcony into boxes, separated by partitions. In "London's Lost Theatres" Errol Shereson says that "the theatre in the slums" was habitually filled with such fashionable people as Lady Blessington and Count D'Orsay. As early as 1825 it became the custom for families, or parties in which there were ladies, to take private boxes rather than occupy the public ones where they were troubled by the proximity of rougher parties.

That ancient line between aristocracy and democracy had never been broken. The mighty middle-class had sat on it, but it was still there, to enable the upper middle-class to despise the lower

middle-class with a disdain no lord had ever felt for his vassal. Rulers could rub shoulders with the hoi polloi, but the burgher feared to mix with his immediate inferiors because his wife's aloof pride might be all that distinguished him from them. Private boxes were not exclusive enough. Places where people sucked oranges had to be avoided altogether. One went somewhere else. In this way some places became vulgar, some select, and some still more select. Every theatre was adapting itself to a particular class; each had playwrights who adorned their tales with whatever morals best suited that class; and just as the poorer populace lived in fashion's cast-off houses, so the audiences at "saloons" had to put up with melodramas for which the West End and the Surrey-side had no further use. Nor must class consciousness be thought of as a whim affecting nothing but clothes, acquaintances, dwellings, and melodramas. Popular imagination could encompass, without an effort, life and death, the immortality of the soul, heaven and hell, but could not with its greatest stretch believe in any future existence where a great lady might meet, on equal terms, her own third-scellery-maid. That great gulf was, to the Victorians, eternally fixed. There were smaller but still unbridgeable gulfs. In "Annals of Our Time" a sequel is reported to the famous Eglington Tournament of 1840. The newspapers were publishing a correspondence between Lady Seymour, the Eglington "Queen of Beauty", and Lady Shuckburgh. Lady Seymour writes to know the character of a servant named Stedman, and whether she was a good plain cook or not. Lady Shuckburgh replies, that having a professed cook and housekeeper, she knows nothing about the under-servants. Lady Seymour explains, that she understood Stedman, in addition to her other talents, had some practice in cooking for the little Shuckburghs. The housemaid is instructed to answer this note, and say, "Stedman informs me that your ladyship does not keep either a cook or housekeeper, and that you can only require a girl who can cook a mutton-chop; if so, Stedman, or any other scullion, will be found fully equal to cook for, or manage the establishment of the Queen of Beauty". Viewed in this spirit places of common entertainment would be more common than

entertaining. That alone would explain why the aristocracy of England eschewed playgoing even when the Royal Opera evaporated in bankruptcy. Then the Queen, persuaded by Prince Albert rather than by public opinion, acquired this middle-class habit, though careful to do so in its most up-to-date (which happened to be the Gallic) form.

For persons of rank and station to do likewise was too much to ask even of a loyalty which was otherwise unwavering. At the time of the royal wedding in 1840 at the Chapel Royal, St. James's, an enterprising manager took the shunned and unwanted theatre in King Street near by, renamed it the Prince's and gave a season of German opera there. The company from Mayence sang horribly: out of compliment to Prince Albert the theatre was crowded. Otherwise the stage was under a cloud the Throne could not dispel. The debauchery of Kean and Elliston was too recent a memory, and harlotry, because of their encouragement, had yet to be driven out-of-doors by the younger Kean and Macready. There was still a vague feeling that players were rogues and vagabonds. Dickens had not helped to overcome that; his kindly portraits of strolling mummers unwittingly seemed to agree with this contempt. No matter how stage-struck his own fancy, his novels might well leave the impression that the actor was a superior kind of tinker or pedlar or ballad-monger with botched Shakespeare among his wares. This is what the fops of Fops' Alley read into "Nicholas Nickleby", and anyhow Vincent Crummles was not a flattering portrait of the Manager, Mr Davenport of No 2, Marlborough Villas, College Street, Chelsea, who ran the Kent circuit.

What kind of performances he gave are recorded by playbills. The Theatre Royal, Canterbury, in the August of 1844 announced Miss Davenport in *Gilbert The Idiot* and *Clari* for a week, "after which the company will proceed to Rochester". There is nothing very much out of the way in this, for a girl of fourteen could reasonably impersonate the Maid of Milan with her yearning for "Home! Sweet Home!" The bill of Theatre, Sandwich, for December 13, 1845, excites more interest because "Miss Davenport will on this night perform Mrs Haller, being her First appearance

in that character in Sandwich". Usually it is buildings that call themselves Dickens originals, but no Bleak House or Old Curiosity Shop or ancient coaching inn was more eager to let people know what was owing to it (artistically) than the actress who claimed to be the Infant Phenomenon in "Nicholas Nickleby". As a child of eleven Jean Davenport was the leading lady of her father's many theatres in 1840; and it would be better not to ridicule the old practice of casting child prodigies for adult parts. To our mockery the playgoer of those days could retort that a generation which has never valued acting for acting's sake has demonstrably no knowledge of acting at all—a point he could prove with ease. There should be no question that Miss Davenport, like most children raised in the wings, "knew her business". Bear this in mind when reading these announcements. Clari's most "thrilling effect", to use one of the bill's phrases, was to clamber out of a window by moonlight, but talent had full scope in *The Stranger*, "that unequalled Play", for the actress of fifteen had to follow Siddons as the erring wife and sorrowing mother who has good cause to soliloquize, "My tears flow; my heart bleeds. Already had I apparently overcome my chagrin: already had I at last assumed that easy gaiety once so natural to me, when the sight of this child in an instant overpowered me. When the Countess called him William—Oh she knew not that she plunged a poniard in my very heart". There was no need for Little Willie's death then because a leading lady could wring hearts without it. At Sandwich, Kemble's rôle descends to very small print—lost among the supporting company where Mr Davenport and Mrs Davenport can just be discerned in character parts. The only letters as large as those given to their daughter boast of the Immediate Patronage of the Worshipful the Mayor next Monday. The manager now has "Residence" at Marlboro Villas, College Street, Brompton, which hints at a sudden access of class consciousness in its topographical form.

Between the drama and the new and fashionable farce in which Miss Davenport would act and sing, there would be a comic song by Mr Cave. In a bright little book published many years later under the title of "A Jubilee of Dramatic Life and Incident of

Joseph A. Cave, Author, Manager, Actor, and Vocalist" there is a description of Theatre, Sandwich, in a stable-yard at the back of a hotel. One night the fisherman's cottage in *The Warlock Of The Glen* was set so far down the stage that the following scene could descend no lower than the chimney pots. Mr Davenport rushed wildly forward, brandishing an oar over his head and bidding the ruffians before him "gang awa' hame". When they had ganged awa' he said, "It's been an awfu' nicht, and the puir auld cottage has been sair dilapidated (during this he was unfastening it from the stage), so I'll tak' it awa' and repair it". Claspings the cottage in his extended arms, he walked off the stage with it, at the same time giving the whistle to change the scene.

In order to explain the more extravagant achievements of the Crummles family, Dickens commentators have observed that in drawing figures from the theatrical world satirically he was following a literary tradition. A better explanation can be found in the popular trick of printing bogus playbills. One specimen sets forth what the Daggerwood Family from the Dunstable Theatre will do at Mr Sylvester Daggerwood's Benefit. Marvels are promised by wife and children down to Master Apollo Daggerwood who will "bear on his Naked Breast a Real Smith's Anvil, while beat by the Cyclops with sledge hammers from Vulcan's forge". Compare this with Crummles' first glimpse of his bride-to-be—"She stood upon her head on the butt-end of a spear, surrounded with blazing fireworks". As for the "literary gentleman" at the dinner-party, he is plainly Edward Stirling. While the novel was appearing in monthly numbers between the April of 1838 and the October of 1838, he wrote his burletta of *Nicholas Nickleby* for the Adelphi in the November of 1838. This is what Dickens had in mind when attacking playwrights who took the uncompleted books of living authors fresh from their hands, wet from the press, who cut, hacked, and carved them, finished unfinished works, and hastily and crudely vamped up ideas not yet worked out by their original projector. His remark about carving them to "the powers and capacities of your actors" takes from this a rich significance, for Smike was changed at the Adelphi by the shapeliness and charm of Mrs Keeley into a kind of principal boy. Her



*Lilian, The Show Girl*

Surrey 1836

success inspired Stirling to write *The Fortunes Of Smike; or, A Sequel To Nicholas Nickleby* in the March of 1840.

That perversity belongs to the old order of things, while rich and poor still rubbed shoulders at the Adelphi despite society's spring-cleaning upheaval. Mrs Keeley was a playgoer's idol unaffected by what a lady in "The London Journal" (February 24, 1849) called the austere and illiberal prejudice which banished women of superior birth and education from the stage and almost exclusively placed "the origin of actresses in a subordinate rank of society". It was really delightful, says this liberal writer, to observe how "Borne on the wings of genius", they emerged from "their original nothingness" to become the objects of general admiration. Something of this was expressed in a Surrey drama of 1836 called *Lilian, The Show Girl; or, The Poor Strollers And The Pedlar's Pack* by George Soane. Lilian is driven from the strollers because the squire is angry that she has caused his son to join the company. She wanders in the storm to a house where Morris's son, left inside a pedlar's pack for the purpose of robbery, is killed. Lilian, charged and convicted, hides in a deserted tin mine. While

pursuers with torches hunt for her in upper and lower galleries, Morris tries to drag her with him into a pool until the squire's son saves her. Another class-conscious drama at the Surrey that year, *The Ocean Of Life; or, Every Inch A Sailor* by John Thomas Haines, presented T. P. Cooke as Mat Merriton. The Honourable Isabella Morville, a castaway after shipwreck, marries Mat for safety's sake, then deserts him and is blackmailed by blackguards who witnessed the wedding. Mat arrives. When she throws herself into his arms, her father says, "Fellow, are you mad? Isabella—wretched girl! Have you nothing to say against this degrading falsehood?" Mat answers, "Fate spliced us, and gave me a right to her that I'll yield to no man breathing". His commanding officer appoints him to the command of a privateer "entitling you to walk the quarter-deck of His Majesty's Navy". Mat asks whether anybody present can blame Bella for marrying one whose only boast is that his commander is pleased to think him—Commander: (Advancing to the front) "EVERY INCH A SAILOR!" The bells strike a merry peal.

## ACT XIII. SCENE II

*Lower middle-class at the Adelphi*

LIKE the hierarchy of the heavenly hosts with its careful grading of angels, the middle-classes of England had now arranged themselves so that every woman knew her place. In mentioning "The kettle on the fire for tea", Leigh Hunt feels constrained to add "nor do the 'first circles' despise the preference of a kettle to an urn, as the third or fourth may do". Since there was caste in kettles, why not in plays? There was; and here likewise the first circles and the fifth had once joined in agreement against the third or fourth. During the craze for "Life in London" Pierce Egan recorded that "The Duchess, at an Opera, informs the Countess of a 'row' which occurred on the last evening with

as much sang-froid as Carrotty Poll mentions to a Costermonger the last she was engaged in at a gin-spinners". This was corroborated when Moncrieff published his stage version, *Tom And Jerry*, and dedicated it to the Duke of York who had "commanded and witnessed" a performance. The preface states that when the Lord Chamberlain was vainly called to suppress it, "His Grace came one night to see it, and brought his Duchess the next". Dukes and dustmen, says Moncrieff, were equally interested. Peers might be seen "mobbing it with Apprentices to obtain admission".

The middle-classes, splitting themselves up meticulously, cultivated pernickety tastes in sentiment to avoid tastes that they deemed beneath them. A chart of Victorian "circles" ought to have been prepared long ago for the use of writers on subjects affected by them. As the sociologist has failed the playgoer, the playgoer must help the sociologist. Records of the theatre will indicate some sections in this elaborate grading of persons which was in England, where social classes were more important than political parties, the substitute for revolutions. Note first that the eighteenth-century division of playhouses into Theatres Royal and Minors implied no distinction socially. Some places were safe for the delicately nurtured and some were not, and this consideration excluded debates about what was fit or unfit—all performances, of course, were highly moral. Niceties and squeamishness about where to be seen, and whom to be seen with, obtruded themselves more and more, as more and more pleasure haunts became safe to be visited.

Hardy revellers, the Toms and Jerrys of real life, were vanishing and with them passed the hey-day of the Surreyside. Timid souls with finicking ideas about where to sit and whom to sit next to wanted a theatre where they could bring their drawing-room airs with them. Complaints now appeared in the Press about the presence in the pit of chimney-sweeps with soot still upon them. Even without the soot there was something objectionable about almost anybody to somebody. People who seemed harmless enough to be near might suddenly reveal themselves as the draper or the haberdasher and wife, or even the grocer. A close-knit system had organized itself so that everybody hoped to be all

the better for courting some neighbours and shunning others. From now on the triumph of virtue was a matter of wearing the right sort of clothes, meeting the right sort of people, being at the right sort of places. Conduct, as Matthew Arnold declared, was most of life. The right sort of behaviour was upheld for righteousness' sake, quite apart from its value in helping professional careers in an age when advancement in all depended on social influence. "Tout le monde porte chapeau", cried an astonished Frenchman when he saw the squalor of Greenwich Fair. Either a topper or a bonnet was on every head. Planché, who tells the story, saw in this battered grandeur, "the vulgar ambition to seem of more consequence than we are". All occasions knit the fabric still closer. Cholera epidemics increased the desire to shun inferiors and cling to superiors. Cabs and omnibuses, from their first appearance in the eighteen-twenties, became, as they multiplied, other marks of class differences. Everybody who rode in the bus was ambitious to ride in a cab. England had become a Progressive Democracy which meant that while still more of the middle-class constantly claimed to be "upper", a new lower middle-class was continually forming underneath.

The effect of this on theatres was particularly marked at the Adelphi. In its early days, when all audiences were rowdy ones, there was little to distinguish it from other pleasure haunts. But as night life became less perilous a difference was revealed between this Minor and all other Minors. It stood in a desirable district. West Strand, ending at Charing Cross where Whitehall led to Westminster and Pall Mall to St. James's, was spacious compared with surrounding thoroughfares. It was separated by the River from the Surrey side whose rowdy spirits used to cross Westminster Bridge to see zoos and side-shows round about Charing Cross, but now had amusements enough of their own, the Surrey Gardens included. London had begun its emphatic way of putting every area and sub-area into its place (allowing very exceptional merit, of course, to leave the fashion to which society had been pleased to call it) and West Strand was now middle-class. Its theatre, then the Sans Pareil, had come into being as the by-product of a linen-washing substance called "Old True Blue",

manufactured from a sooty wood-ash fingered by chance in the Black Forest by a jack-of-all-trades named John Scott. In the dining-room over his shop in the Strand actors were such honoured guests that his daughter became stage-struck. It was she who persuaded him to spend £10,000 to raise the theatre, alongside and behind their house, which opened on November 27, 1806, with an entertainment of songs and recitations entirely written by Miss Scott apart from the finale, which consisted of fireworks. While she acted her own heroines, John Scott, in his shirt-sleeves, packed people closer to increase the takings by five pounds a night. With *Asgard, The Demon Hunter; or, The Diable À La Chasse*, and *The Old Oak Chest; or, The Smuggler's Sons And The Robber's Daughter*, she took her fill of fame and in 1819 the *Sans Pareil* was sold for £25,000.

As the Adelphi it led the life of a Minor until Madame Celeste decided its destiny. She was born in 1814, and as a child won popularity on the Paris stage. At the age of fourteen she went with a troupe of dancers to New York where she became Mrs Elliott the next year. At sixteen she sailed from New Orleans to appear at Liverpool, Glasgow, Dublin, and Edinburgh. In *Masaniello* she took the part of Fenella, the muette of Portici who introduced to the English stage the "dumb dodge of relating an escape from captivity," as Dickens called it—"Clasping the left wrist with the right hand, and the right wrist with the left hand alternately, to express chains, and then going round and round the stage very fast, and coming hand-over-hand down an imaginary cord, at the end of which there is one stroke on the drum and a kneeling to the chandelier". When the "dodge" was new and Celeste was young, the effect was to bring tears to every eye. Later in the year she danced at Drury Lane in Auber's ballet *La Bayadère*, unsuccessfully, whereupon, though unable to speak English, she determined to be an actress. To celebrate the French capture of Algiers, *The French Spy; or, The Wild Arab Of The Desert*, with music by Auber, was written expressly for her powerful and unique talents. Disguises, wild Arab dances, "desperate sword encounters", the frenzies of madness, prophetic visions and silent exultations were the trivial round, the common task, of Mathilde de Meric (A

*The Wept Of The Wish-Ton-Wish*

Adelphi 1831

French lady, assuming the characters of Henri St. Alme, a Cadet of the Lancers, and Hamet Caramanly, a Wild Arab Boy) in the theatres of London, Paris, and the provinces. For some years to come her mute histrionics in a number of other specially devised pieces would excite adulation in the Old World and in the New, where General Jackson introduced her to the heads of state. Yet all this formed but a prologue.

As soon as she set foot on the stage of the Adelphi in the autumn of 1831 the lower-middle-class drama took shape. Considering that the play was Bayle Bernard's *The Wept Of The Wish-Ton-Wish* (a version of the early novel by Fenimore Cooper which was republished as "The Borderers" and "The Heathcotes"), this may seem a singular claim. Yet despite its mixture of Royalist-and-Roundhead with Redskins, the piece had the stamp of femininity. O. Smith was the death-defying Conanchet, Chief of the Narragansetts, who kidnapped from the Valley of the Wish-Ton-Wish the daughter of Major Gough, one of the exiled judges of Charles I. The Wept, now Narramattah, the chief's wife, expressed herself in dumbshow as only Celeste could. When her

child was seized by the white invaders the resemblance to *Pizarro* could barely, notwithstanding the switch round of sympathies, have passed unnoticed. The novelty was in the ending. When Conanchet was shot and the Wept fell lifeless upon his body, melodrama's audiences knew what it was to enjoy a good cry.

This idea must not be derived from "affecting dramas" made in Germany—fearful fate-tragedies which demonstrated how a particular knife would cut somebody's throat on days chosen by the calendar and announced by the title—Zacharias Werner's *The Twenty-Fourth Of February* and Adolph Mullner's *The Twenty-Ninth Of February*. Teutonic thoroughness carried insensibility to the absurd out of the realm of popular imagination into that of massed psycho-pathology. Nothing like these onion-peeling labours occurs even in the dankest marshes of Victorian bathos. Tears fall on Fenimore Cooper's pages because a born story-teller leaves no emotion undisturbed. The Redskin and his pale-face squaw are the old legend of star-crossed lovers in the New World. Cooper gave them one kind of novelty, Celeste another, for when she chose the Wept she was choosing for all the wives who were able to make their husbands conduct them to West Strand. Mrs Siddons had thrown playgoers into faints, swoons, and vapours without achieving this, for tragedies made no peculiar appeal to the housewife's bosom. But here at the Adelphi was drama that did. A heroine torn betwixt love for her father, her sister, her husband, and her child was what the theatre's new public wanted. The unhappy ending was essential. The Victorian mother with her large house and large family liked to see herself as the sufferer she undoubtedly, though in a more protracted and less exciting manner, was.

With a sick husband and a child to demand from her the energy she could not spare from her efforts on the stage, Celeste suffered likewise in her American home. She ran away from a fate which suggested that though the wages of sin was death the wages of virtue on earth might be no higher. Back in London she came to terms with Benjamin Webster, lessee of both the Haymarket and the Adelphi. In the spring of 1841 at the Haymarket, Bernard's domestic drama, *Marie Ducange*, presented her as a simple peasant

*Marie Ducange*  
Haymarket 1841

girl in Jersey, and Webster as a swindling yachtsman who almost persuaded his weak, wealthy, and well-meaning young friend not to marry her. The resemblance to *Lilian, The Show Girl* at the Surrey increased when she went mad in some chalk pits at dusk and the villain fell into them never to emerge. People who left Her Majesty's after the ballet to escape being bored by the opera and crossed the road to see the concluding farce in the Haymarket's bill insisted that this was a house for the polite world's laughter. Webster publicly protested that "no comedy could be got for love or money" and offered £500 as a prize; the best out of a hundred was acted and hooted. That may explain why he tried to give one of his theatres the kind of play suited to the other, which was like persuading the people who rode in cabs to travel by omnibus.

Celeste needed full-length parts in plays designed specially for her. What could be accomplished in this way was evident at the Olympic where Vestris was appearing in the fairy extravaganzas written for her by Planché. What had been a scrum of playwrights was now separating. While Planché made for her-alldry as his goal, Fitzball stayed downright common, preferring



to write for Astleian Knights in circus stables than to do without those glories which poets had in mind when they called him "Terrible". Some, like Jerrold, would aim too high and fail. One at least would be content with the middle course. In this way Buckstone became the representative playwright of the eighteen-forties, though the changes that brought this about also explain why his powers of observing ordinary everyday life were so cramped. He wrote for the middle-class. That quenched the vital spirit which gave the breath of life to his work when he created such characters as Luke the Labourer. All these playwrights astonish us with their power when they depict the man driven to crime, but they had to look socially higher.

In the days when Tom Dibdin was its manager, the Surrey was "the resort of fashion and of talent", says Oxberry. One member of its company was Edward Fitzwilliam, a little Irish singer with a very taking humour. Another was Fanny Copeland, daughter of the manager of the Dover circuit before Crummles' day. "Her smile", says Oxberry, "was worth crossing Blackfriars in a snowy night, to sun in for a moment". She became, though the bridegroom was warned of her past and she of his, Mrs Fitzwilliam. Meanwhile, Buckstone, then at work in a solicitor's office, met her while she was acting in *The Heart Of Mid Lothian* and some dozen years later he recalled how "There are some things, Jeannie, ane can ne'er forget", was said by a Madge Wildfire who for sweetness, pathos, and power had seldom been equalled.

As a comic actor Buckstone was principally engaged at the Haymarket. All his more ambitious plays were for the Adelphi, and in these, the secondary and more attractive heroine was usually Mrs Fitzwilliam. In 1839 she went to New York and then to New Orleans. "Isn't she a darling of an actress?" was the general opinion. She visited a derelict "Swamp Theatre" and every night of her stay it was packed. She returned to New Orleans and there Buckstone appeared with her so happily that local critics assumed that they invariably acted together. On their return to London he went to the Haymarket and she to the Adelphi whose playbills now read, "Lessee Mr Ben Webster. Under the direction of Madame Celeste". How to write a play for two actresses so

tactfully that each would feel confident of outshining the other became Buckstone's problem.

Expiation was his favourite theme. The father of *The May Queen* swindles her lover, jumps into a stream, is rescued, confesses and dies of guilt. In *The Dream At Sea*, Buckstone's Adelphi drama of 1835, O. Smith succumbed to it even though the Cornish maid he was supposed to have murdered came back to life; she scandalized the audience by sitting up in her coffin. There was an understanding between authors and audiences that remorse usually proved fatal—Buckstone's philosophy depended on it (however good the health of Madame Celeste) and in this belief he wrote *The Green Bushes; or, A Hundred Years Ago*. It displayed Celeste, in the speaking part of Miami, with "moccasins on feet, black leggings, beaded, and tied down side of legs, short red petticoat, with Indian trimming, Indian pouch and band, hunting horn of fur skin, rifle and band, bracelets, armlets, bandeau round head, hunting cap made of panther's skin, flesh stockings". She does not appear in Act I, for that takes place in Ireland: it ends when a door opens on a "moonlight Sea View" with a ship in the distance, ready to sail. Connor O'Kennedy, betrayed by his brother to the English soldiers, escapes in a boat, and two years later dwells in the Mississippi valley as the husband of Miami, whose mother was a Royal Indian and her father a French aristocrat. When Geraldine, Connor's wife, enters to soft music and falls prostrate at his feet, Miami revenges herself by taking his life, then jumps from a cliff into the river. The murder is witnessed by two travelling showmen from the Old Kent Road, who pick up her rifle and escape with a squaw on the raft that rescues Miami. Teddy Wright was Master Grinnidge, the master showman, whose inquiry, "Didn't we, Jack?" was backed up by Paul Bedford, as his assistant, with "I believe you, my b-oy-oy-oy!" which became a catch-phrase for years. In the last act the "huntress of the Mississippi" has transformed herself into Madame St. Aubert. While travelling in Ireland, she sees a child at a village smithy who resembles a miniature that Geraldine let fall. Jack Gong and the squaw come to Dublin on their way to Donnybrook Fair, and in the same street Geraldine hears the old ballad of

*The Flowers Of The Forest*

Adelphi 1847

“Green Bushes” sung by her foster-sister, Nelly (Mrs Fitzwilliam). The same refrain is heard by the child as she sits on the window-seat of Madame St. Aubert’s house in Dublin. Miami identifies the rifle Jack Gong brings with him, restores the child to Geraldine and dies. What were Celeste’s private feelings at “situations” which reminded her of the daughter she had left? There was little room for private feelings in a life as active as hers. Although all but exhausted by Miami, she had one of the principal parts in the extravaganza that followed, joined in most of the dances, and executed a *Pas de Fascination*.

Buckstone repeated his success by combining expiation with falsely-accused innocence in *The Flowers Of The Forest* at the Adelphi in 1847. In Cumberland settings he made gypsy life intoxicating. Celeste was Cynthia, daughter of Ismail the Wolf (a fine part for O. Smith’s rages), and Mrs Fitzwilliam was Starlight Bess, basket-maker, fortune-teller, and ballad-singer. Lemuel, Bess’s boy lover, is horsewhipped by Captain Lavrock and swears revenge. Among the tribe is Cynthia, who once rescued Alfred from banditti; now, while he is on his way to marry Lady Agnes,

Lavrock's sister, she rises from a flat tombstone with a cry of "Ha, it is! Yes, yes, I look upon that face again—again. I fall and worship it". Lavrock cancels the wedding and demands satisfaction: before the duel can begin he is shot dead by Lemuel and Alfred is suspected of murder. The Wolf helps Lemuel to escape, but Cynthia drags him to the lobby of the Court of Justice. In the wild retreat where Alfred, wearied by his efforts to trace her, is sleeping, the Wolf commands, "That man must lie a stabbed corpse, and by your hand". Cynthia raises the knife in the light of their torches, plunges it into her own heart as Lady Agnes and her friends appear, crawls to kiss Alfred's hand, springs up and falls dead.

That two leading ladies should have shared one stage for so long is very remarkable. After *The Flowers Of The Forest* there came a parting of the ways. Before the year was out Buckstone had been engaged by Vestris at the Lyceum, where he wrote for himself and Mrs Fitzwilliam a trifle called *A Rough Diamond* which perpetuates the abounding happiness they had in one another. A critic had said that in her elegant comedy there was too much of the chambermaid. Not quarrelling with that verdict she appears as Margery, a warm-hearted hoyden, indifferent to the wealth and title she has gained by marriage, who welcomes her cousin Joe first with a smacking kiss and then with a whacking fist. The idea of class consciousness had, on the stage, inspired nothing better. Both became members of the company at the Haymarket, where Webster, incidentally, had been winning some of the highest praises of his versatile career in *The Roused Lion*. A middle-aged invalid, dubbed a kill-joy by a young cub, displays his skill in singing and dancing, at cards and with the foils, to become "the central and captivating figure of the company, especially to the fairer portion". There was something of the roused lion in Webster's private life from the age of fifty onwards. For Celeste at the Adelphi he adapted an Ambigu drama by Dennery and Dugue, which under such titles as *The Prayer In The Storm* and *The Sea Of Ice* lasted half a century. *The Thirst For Gold* was his title. Celeste, in the scene of a wrecked ship, was stranded with her baby on a berg beneath the Aurora Borealis. During a great storm there is a

sudden and awful breaking up of the ice. The captain is drowned and the mother murdered; the child floats to land, where she is brought up by savages. As Ogavita, who comes bounding on the stage with the grace of a startled doe, Celeste was again a wild huntress; and in the last act, after the heroine has been educated in France, the wild Indian spirit showed through the grace of a Parisian lady. Webster was first a villainous Mexican and then a suavely evil marquis. Adults in that little uncomfortable, decaying theatre complained because the canvas waves scattered so much dust into the auditorium that the drama was "the driest ever looked upon", but children liked the Polar scene because it was easily represented on a bed with pillows for icebergs—another of W. E. Holloway's memories.

That interlocking of two class-distinguished playhouses had a topsy-turvy finale. The Haymarket was taken over by Buckstone, now maturing into one of the greatest of comic actors. "Coxcomb", Macready's diaries dub him, and his early portraits do show a self-assured twist to the little mouth. If this were so then he illustrates a cocky young Englishman's ability to grow old gracefully. Beneath odd eyes, grotesque nose and cheeks shaped like cutlets, that mouth drawn down to one corner became a money-box slit which let fall all the gold of good-will. That was how he played Cousin Joe for the last time at the Haymarket. Cholera broke out in the summer of 1854. Many were stricken, among them Mrs Fitzwilliam. In the November, when the plague seemed to have passed, she suddenly collapsed and after a few hours was dead. Buckstone put *The Rough Diamond* out of his repertoire, and published it with the notice that whatever of goodness of heart, affection, cheerfulness, honesty, and self-sacrifice may be found in the character of Margery, the truthfulness with which Mrs. Fitzwilliam "pourtrayed such qualities may be mainly ascribed to the fact that they existed in her own genuine and most genial nature". The old actor, with many more years of comedy before him, married. At the age of 56 he was presented with a son who was given the second Christian name of Copeland. There are some things one can ne'er forget.

## ACT XIII. SCENE III

*Upper middle-class at the Princess's*

WHILE the middle-classes of England were still sorting themselves out, while each district of London was trying to know its place and behave accordingly, while the theatres were still uncertain about their particular types of audience, the Gallic drama arrived. No social distinctions belonged to it at first. *Don César De Bazan*, some ten weeks after its Paris première, was welcomed by West End and Surreyside alike: four versions, opening in mid-October, 1844, included one at the Aldephi with Webster opposite Celeste. There was then no distinguishing, on the English stage, French melodrama from French romanticism. Both were treated alike until Londoners had settled down.

How thoroughly society's voluntary and undictated reorganization completed itself can be seen in the effect on entertainments—the superficial aspect of that powerful spirit called Victorianism which has yet to be studied and understood. What moral change can be detected seems rather a slackening (no matter what popular prejudice may feel about this) than a tautening of ideas about virtue. Piety ran its highest temperature before any influence could be brought to bear on the country by the blithe, alert young woman who occupied the Throne. The Kemble tradition, after the fall of Edmund Kean, again set the ideal of moral dignity. It was upheld by Macready, whose dramatist was Sheridan Knowles. Covent Garden was their theatre, and there, the more uncompromisingly lofty their attitude, the more the public stayed away. No better spokesman for that generation could be found than the theatrical recorder named John William Coleman. He left the Army to take leading parts in Edinburgh and at his very first appearance played Iago to the Othello of Edmund Kean; he went into management at Dublin, became the private secretary of Charles Kean and in 1859 published "The

Life and Times of Charles Kean", which will be quoted in this chapter because it eloquently expresses the more conservative spirit of its day. Even loyalty to "Mr C. Kean" cannot curb his disapproval of tendencies, new or old, which fell beneath Macready's standard not of art but of purity. A tribute to Sheridan Knowles indicates his outlook. Woman in that poet's plays is so loved and revered that his female portraitures present no Clytemnæstras, Messalinas, Medeas, or Lady Macbeths, and so, "We are truly rejoiced at this opportunity of rendering feeble tribute to the first of living dramatists, who combines the truth and energy of the giants of an earlier age, entirely divested of those errors in taste which blacken and deform many of their most resplendent passages". Such a thirst for spiritual perfection could not be slaked in the theatre and Knowles turned Baptist preacher. Champions of the old spirit were wise to leave. How little room was left for them became increasingly evident as the Theatres Royal were devoted more and more to the blood and thunder of opera.

One last attempt to keep in touch with Sheridan, made by Ves- tris when she held Covent Garden, must be recorded because it brings in Bourcicault (sometimes signing himself Dion de P. Bourcicault) born in Dublin on December 20, 1822, who was to become known as the Shakespeare of melodrama because of four hundred plays, none original after his preliminary endeavours before the age of twenty-one. While a student at London University he contributed to "Bentley's Miscellany" a blank verse account of Creation:

Each atom jostling  
Its fellow—in haste to pleasure *Him*—so form'd  
A turgid lump, which swinging to and fro  
On a black sea of thickening vapour,  
An unwholesome sweat oozed from the slimy depths  
Of this miscarried mass;

which makes it very evident that the author aspired to major works of English literature. When, still in his teens, he turned to the stage, he aimed at the standard of the classics—and so successfully that old actors insisted for years on some mystery of author-

ship. Round about his eighteenth birthday he wrote *London Assurance*, and on March 4, 1841, it was acted, as the work of "Lee Morton", at Covent Garden by London's leading players of comedy. Youthful high spirits offset its artificial wit, and boisterous good nature tempers the elegance of Dazzle—played by Charles Mathews  *fils*, the young husband of Vestris—when he exerts his London assurance upon country gentlefolk for their own good. Sheridan's traditions stamp the morals as well as the style. Drunkenness, divorce and debt, serious evils to the Minor drama, are subjects for humour here. The pretty romance of fame won overnight by a young author is marred only by the protests of John Brougham, another playwright from Dublin, who had been an actor in Madame Vestris's company from 1831 to 1840, when he became manager of the Lyceum. According to just one of the stories told by him, *London Assurance* was uncommonly like the play he had sold to her before he left.

When Bourcicault wrote another original play Webster pointed out that the translation of any French play cost £25. Bourcicault sold for £100 a piece that had taken six months to compose, and accepted a commission to translate three French scripts at £50 apiece—"child's play for a fortnight". Legend declares that while in Paris he secured a wife with money through a matrimonial agency. He went up the Alps with her, came down with a black hatband, and then drove a pair of grey ponies in Hyde Park. The story, which need not be believed, is evidence of a flamboyant personality. The young author who had been led forward at Covent Garden, "eyeing the enthusiastic multitude with considerable nervousness" as "The Times" said, was determined not to let life be the anti-climax it was trying to be when his next attempts to enliven it failed. Directly he turned hack, successes were his for the taking. His *The Willow Copse*, revived for twenty years or more, was adapted from *La Closerie De Genêts* by Frédéric Soulié, masterpiece among father-and-daughter dramas. It had two broken-hearted fathers, two daughters, several lovers, and one baby. This, originating at the Ambigu in 1846, arrived at the Adelphi five years later in time for the theatrical boom caused by Arts and Sciences in the Great Exhibition year.



What history records as the Crystal Palace moved Coleman to sentences capable of being chanted like canticle or psalm. It might well, he said, be called the world's wonder, for such in truth it was—"The most perfect realization of a magnificent idea that ever entered the mind of man. The blessing which was invoked by the greatest of earthly sovereigns on the inaugural day had been signally vouchsafed. The six months which followed were pregnant with instruction. All felt they were entering on a scene devoted exclusively to instructive recreation, where evil passions had no field for their exercise".

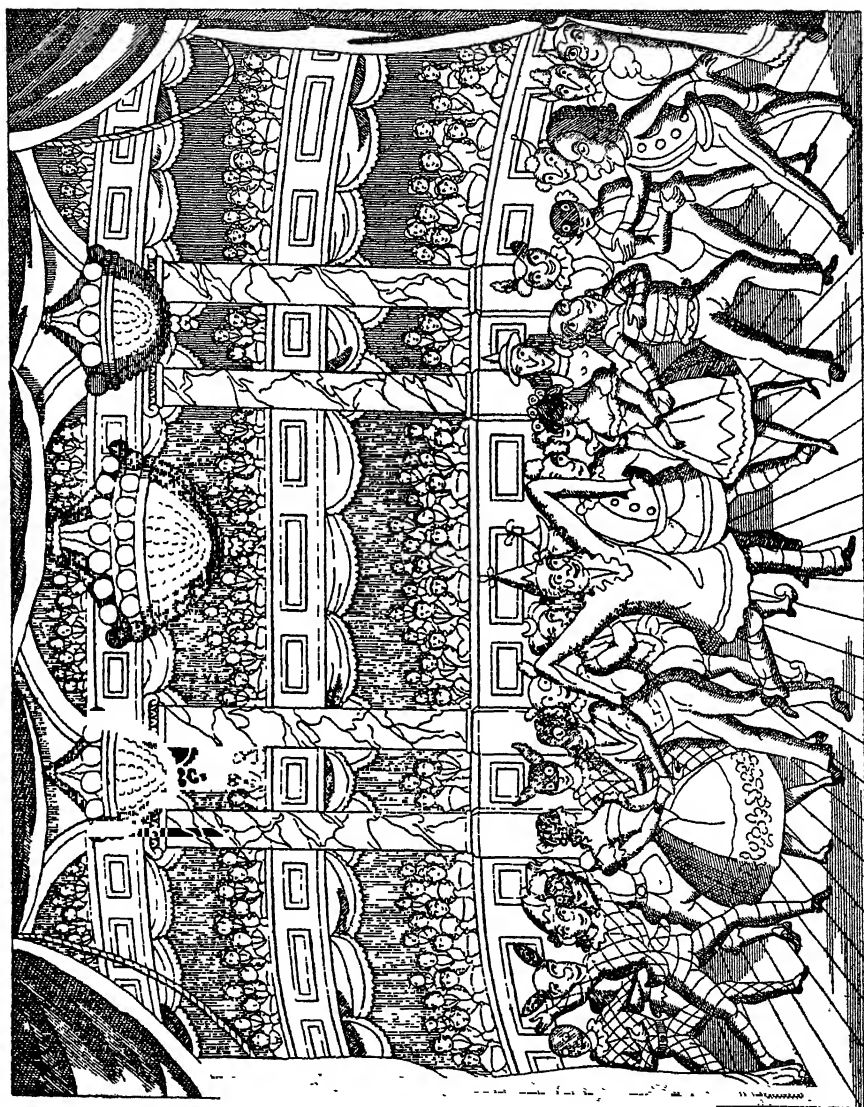
After much more in a strain full of Chosen People sentiments with pity for the foreigner, he comes down to brass tacks. During the summer of 1851, he says, there were nineteen theatres open in London, exclusive of the two Italian operas and the St. James's. Hippodromes, gardens, casinos, Grecian Saloons, and a thousand and one irregulars also presented dramatic performances under some form or other daily and nightly. More than half the plays were adaptations or translations from the French; while at least five-sixths of the crowded audiences were either foreigners or holiday excursionists.

In this exalted atmosphere Charles Kean donned the purple. Macready had decided to retire and a pair of shoulders in the right place would show where his mantle must fall. There is no doubt whatever about the loftiness of the new manager's intentions. Shakespeare would be his proper domain. Next would come Byron. Modern dramatists were to be headed by Sheridan Knowles, for whose *The Rose Of Aragon* Mr and Mrs Kean had been engaged by Webster at the Haymarket some ten years previously. Thus the purple was to be worn as by John Philip Kemble, but the prosperity of the Great Exhibition year removed it as the sun the traveller's cloak. Nor is it without significance that the theatre happened to be the Princess's. It stood in a district which for the time being was distinctly upper middle-class (and therefore much more inclined than Coleman to take the broad view of what was and what was not virtue). The Prince Regent had blazed his trail through this land. After laying out to the north-west a park that deserved to be London's particular pride, he

caused Regent Street to be cut as the approach to it from Carlton House. Where Nash's elegant stucco thoroughfare crossed the route to Tyburn's gallows, the cross-roads became Oxford Circus, which let some light into the jungle of shops and houses. A little to the east of this, on the north side of Oxford Street, a Royal Bazaar, British Diorama and Exhibition of Works of Art, opened under the special patronage of the Regent when he came to the throne as George IV.

By special permission, the building was renamed Princess's when other Minors were taking royal titles without permission, and it went in for opera. At length it found a rightful owner in the actor-manager who had been appointed Master of the Revels at Windsor to the Queen. As for Mrs Charles Kean, she was then all that the Queen was supposed to stand for later. No British matron has more completely absorbed the spirit, the whole spirit and nothing but the spirit of Britannia. Her authority was such that when she presented herself to her public as beautiful, she was, despite evidence to the contrary, beautiful; in bull-necked middle-age, rising fifty, she was classically young. She was as brave as a lioness and in real life would have accepted the challenge which on the stage scared her when she played Viola in *Twelfth Night*. During a severe and constantly recurring illness which forced her to leave the stage for many months, she demonstrated her fearlessness at rehearsal. There was a cataract scene and the raft missed its cue. The actor appointed to float upon it high above the level of the footlights came forward with the protest, "It would endanger a man's life to venture on it. I really cannot incur such a risk". Some talk about averting the peril was interrupted by applause. The raft was passing steadily across and upon it Mrs Kean stood bolt upright.

Might not this regal and imperturbable empress of all make-believe have impressed the young queen of reality? Her Majesty, says Coleman, engaged a box and "marked her approbation of the theatre by constant personal attendance". That is of historic importance because the Princess's was not what we now understand by the term Victorian. It created the Gallic drama by tampering with accepted ethics. Vice in this was given such a long run for its



*The Corsican Brothers*  
Princess's 1852

money that the scanty triumphs virtue won were barely noticeable. At the Théâtre Historique in Paris, terrors, tears, laughter, clash of swords, clatter of spurs, spasms of agony, poniards, poisons, trap-doors, and moonlight simply amounted to blood and thunder for its own sake—for adventure. At the Princess's in London there was a difference, because the actor-manager, educated at Eton and used to polite ways, chose such plays as conformed to his idea of cultured demeanour: the plots might be the same but the effect was different. Dumas forgot to point a moral through carelessness. Charles Kean remembered not to point a moral through snobbishness. To be gentlemanly the stage had to be considerably less virtuous. Feeling and sentiments were, like cast-off toppers and bonnets, for the lowest orders. Since there was no shadow of a doubt about this, *Pauline* was passed to Oxenford, the critic, to be adapted. Coleman reports, "The situations in this drama are dangerous and revolting. Nothing but the most artistic delineation, regulated by good taste, could have rendered them endurable to any English audience". The Queen was so stirred that she grasped the curtains of her box convulsively until the agony was past. Coleman was satisfied when the Keans appeared at their benefit, in *The Gamester*. "A moral lesson worthy of the pulpit", were his words of unstinted praise. In the spring of 1852 Shakespeare was varied by another specimen of the French "higher school"—*The Corsican Brothers*—with its sharply contrasted scenes of crowded masquerade and grim duels in a lonely wood. "More peculiar than *Pauline*", was Coleman's verdict; George Henry Lewes spoke of its "horrible termination"; its success in London was far greater than in Paris despite his protest that it was gratuitously shocking. Charles Kean, Lewes threatened, would damage himself in public estimation by such moral mistakes, showing a vulgar lust for the lowest sources of excitement—"The tragedy of the shambles". The tendency of the senses was downwards. To gratify them stimulants must be added and added, chilli upon cayenne, butchery upon murder, and there lay "the secret weakness and inevitable failure of Melodrama". Yet *The Corsican Brothers* bears less resemblance to melodrama, since it lacks the moral tone, than to the

Elizabethan "tragedies of blood" in its fidelity to the solitary theme of revenge.

The play was translated by Bourcicault, who at this time was acting a vampire with a brogue. On the stage he drank his victim's blood; off the stage he fascinated a Scottish girl whose demure loveliness put to shame every face painted by Greuze in the same style. Agnes Robertson, born in Edinburgh on Christmas Day, 1833, began as an infant prodigy through standing on a stool at a testimonial concert and singing "Love is a mischievous boy". At seventeen, when she made her London debut at the Princess's, she lived with the Keans, who made her the pet of the company and tried vainly to protect her from the wiles of the young Irishman, disarmingly blue-eyed, "cold as steel". She was a favourite of the Queen. When Kean submitted the cast for a command performance at Windsor Castle, her Majesty insisted that a part must be found for "little Miss Robertson", though she was one of three culprits who spied through a fanlight and giggled when the acting-manager tried to walk backwards up the steps in a corridor while carrying candles to light the way for the Royal visitors. He missed his footing and sat suddenly down on the top step. The Queen saw the faces at the fanlight, pointed them out to the Prince Consort, leant against the wall and "laughed long and loudly". His Royal Highness was shocked at such levity, and looked it.

More Gallic dramas arrived. *Lancers; or, The Gentleman's Son*, says Coleman, gave universal satisfaction because, "Nothing could be more complete than a *fac simile* of a modern drawing-room", with a full company of ladies and gentlemen arrayed in fashionable attire, and moving with the ease of polished society. Another, *Faust And Marguerite*, divided opinions over its "moral and religious tendency", for some objectors wondered how it passed the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain. A third, *Le Courier De Lyons*, began its English career at popular playhouses, and did not seem suitable to the drawing-room manner until Charles Reade's *The Courier Of Lyons; or, The Attack Upon The Mail* was staged at the Princess's in 1854. In the last scene Dubosc leans out of a window to watch the procession to the scaffold.

His victim, compelling bystanders to see guilt on that face, is brought up the stairs to his room by a mob demanding vengeance. This inflamed Jerrold: blood and thunder from the Boulevard succeeded where his own efforts had failed, though his moral had concerned "the wealth that makes the only treasure of the married home—A HEART OF GOLD". Such was the national drama that had been ousted by the Gallic drama. Certain writers, Jerrold wrote, "have properly denounced such atrocities as *Mephistophiles*, *The Courier Of Lyons*, and so forth, as so much stage pollution". The English Channel, to him, divided the good from the bad. He drew the line in space. Fate drew it in time. By writing no more for the stage he accepted its decree. He belonged to the departed world of Macready and Knowles; Charles Kean in 1851 had set a standard that would hold till the end of the century.

Not that the world was still devoted exclusively to instructive recreation. Evil passions found a field for their exercise when the war with Russia was celebrated at the Princess's in the November of 1854 with *Schamyl*, *The Circassian Hero*, adapted by Palgrave Simpson from a piece then running in Paris. Coleman comments that Circassia's liberation was as confidently looked for as "the carrying of the fleet at Cronstadt by our gallant admirals' sharpened cutlasses". Playgoers were not excited. This kind of thing were best left to Cooke, the circus showman who advertised the Alma, Inkerman and Balaklava at Astley's Amphitheatre in Lambeth. Not that Kean's showmanship could be despised. He was the first actor to bask in limelight—lime had been heated in an oxyhydrogen flame in 1826, but nearly thirty years passed before it illuminated *Henry VIII* at the Princess's—and he invented the sliding trap for his "awfully real ghost, without blue fire, that glided upon the scene in so incomprehensible a manner".

Since spectacle was employed upon tragedy and melodrama alike, there came into being an idea that Shakespeare was simply glorified melodrama. George Henry Lewes answered, "Sophocles and Shakespeare are as 'sensational' as Fitzball and Dumas; but the situations, which in the latter are the aim and object of the piece, to which all the rest is subordinated, in the former are the mere starting-points, the nodes of dramatic action". His theory

was put to the test when Kean chose *Louis XI* by Casimir Delavigne, originally played at the Théâtre Français in February 1832. This tragedy in rhymed verse after the classic style was intended as a condemnation of hereditary monarchy at a time when the hereditary peerage had just been abolished. The king's feeble superstition and his adamant cruelty are exhibited in a slight story, effectively staged, of his terror when trapped by the revengeful Duc de Nemours, who spares his life in contempt; at the point of death the king, offering a bribe to the next world, grants a pardon too late. Merely by turning Alexandrines into unburdened dialogue, Bourcicault made lighter entertainment of this. Irony became comic relief; hypocritical piety a playful vein of humbug; and a happy ending pointed the moral that Louis XI was not such a bad king after all. At the Princess's, early in 1855, the gentlemanly spirit prevailed. Here was no monster—merely an eccentric old autocrat—and the transmogrification was a piece of character-painting that for direct effect upon an audience's senses has rarely been surpassed. The method which placed Shakespeare and Delavigne on one level indicated how one spirit was dominating the stage and the age. That spirit in its origin had made virtue and worldly success indistinguishable. Now one of its many ramifications was that Shakespeare in Oxford Street was necessarily loftier than Shakespeare in districts of a lower class. In "Our Recent Actors" by Westland Marston (then the best playwright the national drama could produce) a relevant railway-carriage conversation is reported. An ardent playgoer declares, "You must prepare yourself, Mr Kean, for a hard battle with the supporters of Phelps". To which Kean (after a pause) retorts, "But Mr Phelps is a manager of a suburban theatre; our interests are not likely to clash". That was true enough. Though Phelps was making history at Sadler's Wells by reviving nearly all Shakespeare's plays and reviving them admirably, to the class-conscious he did not exist. *Pizarro*, as a Princess's production, was more important, all the more particularly because Kean, instead of cutting down the usual rustic bridge when escaping with the infant, "swung himself by the pendent branch of a tree across a tremendous chasm, and being mortally struck by the musketry of

the Spanish soldiers, in the passage, was seen staggering through the rocks and glades until he disappeared in the distance, the effect of perspective being carried out by a duplicate figure of smaller size, which gave rise to endless conjectures and arguments as to how this optical delusion could be contrived". That took your breath away.

Nor could George Henry Lewes keep aloof from this life where thought went about corseted and behaved as though it never left those heavily curtained drawing-rooms where even arm-chairs were strictly differentiated in sex (so as to accommodate crinolines). He can call upon the heavens with anyone when the intellectual smile gives place on his festooned face to the nimbus of Jupiter. In 1853, not foreseeing that he was himself about to outrage current decencies by irregular connexion with a female novelist, he yields himself up to righteous indignation and the phraseology of the melodramatist with, "At Drury Lane we were threatened with a version of *La Dame Aux Camélias*, but the Lord Chamberlain refused a licence to this unhealthy idealization of one of the worst evils of our social life. Paris may delight in such pictures, but London, thank God! has still enough instinctive repulsion against pruriency not to tolerate them. . . . If any Lord Chamberlain be supine enough to license it—but there is no fear!" There was cause for fear. The devil that lurked in opera was to blame. Verdi, a year after he had seen *La Dame Aux Camélias* in Paris, brought out his operatic version, *La Traviata*, in Venice. The soprano, who declared, as Violetta (Marguerite Gautier renamed), that she was wasting away, was of such girth that the news upset the audience. Even so the failure of the piece was attributed to its morals and modern dress. The period was set back a century, a change that affected all the cast except Violetta, for she, in accordance with the unquestioned rights of a prima donna, wore the latest creations of Worth. Piccolomini sang this rôle at Her Majesty's in 1856 to packed houses. In letters to "The Times" its morality was attacked and defended in a correspondence notable because it inspired a Victorian to pull a brick from the structure of respectability by means of a jest that now passes as fairly modern. "It was generally admitted", he said, "that the



opera was not one of those to which a girl could take her mother.” When the play was acted in English at the Lyceum in 1858 the Gallic conquest was complete.

Where the next major influence was coming from had already been indicated six years earlier, when Fitzball wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, The Horrors Of Slavery* for Drury Lane, and three other versions of the same story for other theatres.

## ACT XIV. SCENE I

*From Pocahontas to Uncle Tom's Cabin*

CARGOES of treasure unladen on the wharves of Deptford and Cadiz were not the finest gift from the New World to the Old. La Belle Sauvage, if the brawlers after loot could attend a little more to her, was a sign and a portent. Civilization, she might show them, had headed the wrong way. Believe what you like of her, take your choice between fact and fiction, the outcome is the same. The Christian was contemptible beside the heathen. No human being in the wildest places was so debased as those who swore by the Cross. From the day she slipped ashore amid bales of silk and bars of gold the idea was born of the noble savage, that great achievement of lay propaganda. It was a fiction invented to draw attention from the fact of the ignoble Christian.

In one of the world's greatest masterpieces of melodrama on canvas, the Chief Powhatan, placed on high to see justice done upon the English captive, starts angrily from his tribal throne in the war tent. Between the victim on the sacrificial stone and the upraised tomahawk, the Princess Pocahontas, lithe, barbaric, naked to the waist, has placed her own neck. The brush of W. A. Lenders has said all there is to say as far as legend is concerned and said it better than play or poem could. There is no need to search history for awkward facts. The spirit of the story is the consciousness that civilized Europeans were less virtuous than the savages they exploited. Simply because the idea appealed less to the intellect than to the emotions, less to the scholar and philosopher than to the mass of amusement-seekers, it aroused the spirit of a crusade. In the years when religion was hypocrisy and feeling a pose, generation after generation steadily developed this one isolated social virtue, this one proof that the doctrine of "see that

ye love one another" had not been perverted out of all existence. That it was the gift of the New World is evident directly you see what had otherwise been the accepted view of slaves with black faces. Abdelazer, captured son of the King of Fez, was the hero of one or two Elizabethan plays; he was dramatized afresh by Mrs Behn and changed by Dr Young into Zanga of *The Revenge*, who was still holding his own on the stage midway through the nineteenth century. He was a devil of bloodthirstiness, of a race that enslaved Christians long after any such barbarity had ceased to be practised in Europe upon Moors.

The conflict was between Cross and Crescent, not colours of skin; racial prejudices were so vaguely understood in Shakespeare's day that Othello might be called Moor or blackamoor. One of Portia's suitors is Prince of Morocco; and Oroondate, another prince of Morocco, cut a romantic figure on the French stage in 1645, long before a name like this was bestowed upon the royal slave who had a nature as free and open as Shakespeare's noble Moor. Very soon the story of Yarico's selfless devotion was told in print, a tale like that of Pocahontas except that this time there was no cloaking the infamy of the white. Virtue's home was in the savage's breast. Rousseau chose a Hottentot, but some twenty years earlier his ideas were clearly and wittily expressed in Paris by a piece which brought the native American upon the stage for the first time. *Arlequin Sauvage*, played by the Comédiens Italiens in Paris on June 17, 1721, was by de l'Isle, a playwright whose wit is matched by brilliant intellect. In a light-hearted trifle that still amuses, he attacks the Law, the Arts and the Sciences with arguments more reasonable than those of Rousseau, which he anticipates by over a score of years. His work is also noteworthy as the first entertainment to exhibit (like *The Messenger From Mars* and *The Wonderful Visit*) a dumbfounded inquirer from another world. *Arlequin Sauvage* is not only first in time, but in wit and insight as well. Deriding our mercenary habits he points out that everything costs money, even justice, which gets to the root of our troubles as neatly as one sentence can. Yet it remains entertainment, ranging easily from clowning with a mirror, humour in scenes of courtship and satire against

lawyers, to one butterfly dip in and out of a soul's tragedy. The savage has accepted all that has been offered him in a shop and is angry when payment is demanded. Lelio, his master, explains the use of money:

*Arlequin:* Since I've no money I suppose I'm poor :

*Lelio:* Without doubt you are.

*Arlequin:* What! Shall I be obliged to work like the wretches who have to do that in order to live?

*Lelio:* No doubt about it.

*Arlequin:* The devil take you. Why, you scoundrel, why did you bring me from my country to learn that I'm poor? I should've been unaware of it all my life but for you. In the forests I knew nothing of either riches or poverty. I was a king in my own eyes, my own master and my own servant, and you have callously dragged me from this happy state to teach me that I'm nothing but a wretched slave. What have you to say to that, you scoundrel, man without honour, without kindliness?

*Arlequin sheds tears.*

Fact follows fiction. Playhouse types that the *Mayflower* left behind were the problem awaiting the Pilgrim Fathers when they landed at Plymouth Rock. Major Richard Roger's tragedy, *Ponteach; or, The Savages Of America*, published in 1766 but left unacted, was written from first-hand knowledge of the natives of the New World. It was ignored while, *Pizarro* was much admired everywhere, including New York where Kotzebue's vogue was particularly intense. In the midst of it Toussaint L'Ouverture, the negro leader at Hayti, was acting the part of Rolla in real life. Here was another heroic black figure for the stage. He was acted by Frédérick-Lemaître in a tragedy by Lamartine, written in verse that culminates in the hero's cry of, "Vous triomphez, o blancs, j'avais un cœur".

One of the American playwrights, I. N. Barker, turned the legendary idyll into *The Indian Princess; or, La Belle Sauvage*, acted at Philadelphia in 1808. In a revised form it was played at Drury Lane in 1820 under the title of *Pocahontas; or, The Indian Princess*. These are not the Redskin's first footprints on the English stage, for Charles Isaac Mungo Dibdin (Tom's brother) brought out *Ko And Zoa; or, The Belle Sauvage* at Sadler's Wells in 1802 and it is probably this that Barker referred to when he

wrote, believing he had been forestalled, "You must yourself have been the victim of these odd coincidences, and just as you had fixed upon a subject or title, found yourself superseded—a thing next in atrocity to the ancients' stealing all one's fine thoughts". Nobility was the mark of the savage, submissive or sanguinary. It had to be because it was essential to the philosophy of naturalism. He was an abstract upon which could be demonstrated the love of freedom. Occasionally, very occasionally, the public did come in contact with a person of colour. There was, for example, the Hottentot Venus. Aphrodite was contrasted with her because

The former fair form had no equal before  
And the latter no equal behind

but such a poor unhappy creature in a showman's booth startled very few Europeans into wondering whether the noble savage was, off the stage, merely a human being in need of food and comfort.

However romantic the Mohicans and Cherokees of Fenimore Cooper, they did bring virgin forests more within sight of hearth and home; he was the authentic voice of the New World. Compared with the popular playwrights and novelists who had written about the Americas he was a sober realist. What he meant then can best be judged by contrasting him with a European, whose career runs parallel with his from their early adventures at sea, when both were inspired with the idea of compiling naval histories. It is significant that the one written by Sue should have travestied fact because his object was always to make what was near-at-hand seem fantastically remote. On the other hand, Cooper made what was (to Europeans) fantastically remote seem near-at-hand. His novels that created a legend out of Leatherstockings, whose poaching habits endeared him to all democratic hearts, were the delight of cities everywhere. On the stage, where their spell of wild life could not be evoked, Uncas was never a match for the Incas. None of Cooper's Redskins or Palefaces won a place among favourite American characters at the footlights, although "The Pioneers" was effectively dramatized by Tom Dib-

*The Wigwam*

Covent Garden 1830

din as *The Wigwam; or, The Red Men Of The Wilderness*, at Covent Garden in 1830, a rousing picture of conflict between Redskin, Pioneer, Colonial and Republican, with a British Jolly Jack Tar thrown in. Just because it has several fine characters the piece appealed less to actors than plays such as those which "starred" Paulding's pioneer, Colonel Nimrod Wildfire. After playing this part in *The Lion Of The West* in the United States, James H. Hackett came to England and brought out a sequel to it, written by Bayle Bernard—*The Kentuckian; or, A Trip To New York*, which showed Nimrod to Covent Garden audiences in 1833. This aside is uttered to explain, in part, why the Indian chiefs of Fenimore Cooper lacked the popularity, on the boards, of his pirates and sailors who took naturally to the footlights. Redskins were then no match for the negro because they appealed to a quieter emotion. Fenimore Cooper held them up to respect—so much so that in *The Wigwam*, the hero, destined to wed the judge's daughter, boasts that his mother was a squaw.

Victorians were happiest when most indignant. The regular process of castigating vice that all novels and plays employed to create excitement had taken effect; and when an outlet for all this



*James H. Hackett as Nimrod Wildfire in The Lion of the West*

From Scribner's, July 1879

feeling was needed in real life, negro slavery distracted attention from profit-making horrors nearer home. The arrangement, which pleased everybody except Southern planters, suited negro actors, Ira Aldridge particularly. If the story that he had been Edmund Kean's dresser should happen to be true, the way he trained his natural gifts is plain. He told English newspapers another story. "The Theatrical Times" of April 15, 1848, roundly declared that his forebears were African princes until his father wished to exchange prisoners taken in battle rather than sell them into slavery. As his chiefs profited by the old arrangement, the father of the Roscius became a clergyman in New York. American stage historians say that Ira Aldridge was born in 1804 at Bellair,

*The Black Doctor*

City of London 1846

near Baltimore, went to England, and turned actor on his return to Baltimore at the Mud Theatre. Whatever the facts of his upbringing, there can be no doubt that he had a mind above the ordinary with, as Mrs Kendal said, "gleams of great intelligence". He played Oroonoko and Rolla. In Shakespeare he dispensed with the black gloves usually worn by Othellos of the theatre and displayed his own black hands, with his finger-nails "expressly apparent". *Titus Andronicus* was revived so that he could play Aaron, the Moor who digs the late lamented out of their graves to prop the corpses in the doorways of sorrowing relations—crime exultant on holiday. Lear and Macbeth were also among the characters he played, and his success in England was followed by veritable triumphs on the Continent, until he died in Poland. At a later date Dicks published *The Black Doctor* by Ira Aldridge, as performed at the City "in July 1841"—so the title-page states. Something is wrong because it is adapted from *Le Docteur Noir* by Anicet-Burgeois and Dumanoir, in which Frédéric-Lemaître was "poetique et terrible" at the Porte-Saint-Martin in the July of 1846. After being damned by Balzac as "le comble de la stupidité,



la médiocrité dans ses saturnales", the piece was hastily appropriated for London; also for New York some years later when it was billed as *Fabian The Serf And Pauline Of Bourbon*. The doctor saves everybody's life once and Pauline's habitually. During the French Revolution he saves hers for the last time and loses his own.

All civilization was stirred in 1851 when Mrs Beecher Stowe, daughter, sister, and wife of teachers and preachers, wrote for the "National Era" of Washington the first chapters of "Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly." So much feeling is still excited by the subject of her story that to regard merely its effect on popular imagination can be thought cold-blooded. But arguments about whether the author was right or wrong, whether the pictures she drew were natural or exaggerated, should not detract from the power of her story as unerring melodrama. There is a strategy here that can be found nowhere else. Neither Uncle Tom nor his cabin are what the excitement is about. He is submissive, Christian, and virtuous. As such he is a noble frontispiece—but few who respect martyrs are particularly interested in them. While Uncle Tom keeps order the author springs surprises. The real plot is about desperate, fiery, and even unchaste "noble savages"—a term used here as a literary idea recurring in literary works though "Lowly" is the author's word. Who was stirred by the sufferings of "The Lowly" in any novel about English operatives? Championship of the rights of the African had become inherited memory. Uncle Tom was still Rousseau's Hottentot.

Kneading the mind of the masses is a long job. "Preaching to the converted" is but a mild way of saying that Mrs Beecher Stowe wrote for an expectant public. The shade of Mrs Behn had stalked forth from the cloisters of Westminster Abbey. The wrongs of the Royal Slave and all his subjects were to be righted at last and it had taken the better part of two centuries. Oroonoko is George, except that the latter has a more princely spirit in him and that his story has improved. Yarico is, though less plainly, Miss Cassy; the resemblance is hidden merely because the betrayal has not been frustrated and in soul and body she bears the awful stigma of it. "It was a face that, once seen, could never be forgotten—one of those that at a glance seem to convey to us an

ideal of a wild, painful, and romantic history. Her forehead was high, and her eyebrows marked with beautiful clearness. Her straight, well-formed nose, her finely-cast mouth, and the graceful contour of her head and neck showed that she must once have been beautiful, but her face was deeply wrinkled with lines of pain, and of proud and bitter endurance. Her complexion was sallow and unhealthy, her cheeks thin, her features sharp, and her whole form emaciated. But her eye was the most remarkable feature—so large, so heavily black, overshadowed by long lashes of equal darkness, and so wildly mournfully despairing. There was a fierce pride and defiance in every line of her face, in every curve of the flexible hip, in every motion of her body; but in her eye was a deep, settled night of anguish—an expression so hopeless and unchanging as to contrast fearfully with the scorn and pride expressed by her whole demeanour.”

Here is la Belle Sauvage affected by postponement of a happy ending. She was not a personage that the great sentimental public could take to its heart with Uncle Tom, Topsy, and Eva, but she was a dramatic personage for stage hacks to make their own. Types copied from Miss Cassy, as she was in retrospect, or from her son George, became permanent features of the theatre. Mrs Beecher Stowe's pages reveal the dramatic sense which is so often possessed by novelists who never go near the footlights and so rarely by those who do. By one of those puzzles which nobody can explain, this pastor's wife describes all her scenes in terms of the stage. While she was imagining Eliza's escape across the floes of ice, two hardened melodramatists in Paris were arranging the breaking up of a sea of ice as a sensation for their new spectacle (billed later in America as *The Sea Of Ice*). While she was planning the scene of the next narrow escape as a ravine where a tree grew out of the rocks, Charles Kean was making this into a “practicable” setting for Rolla's escape in his magnificent revival of *Pizarro*. These coincidences barely need to be explained. When a whole civilization is engaged in using its imagination melodramatically, novelists and playwrights, alike, and in bulk, inevitably use identical means to achieve some thrilling effect.

"The American Stage", by Coad and Mims, states that in August 1852 a version by C. W. Taylor of Mrs Stowe's story failed at Purdy's National Theatre, New York, after eleven performances. Another by George L. Aiken, which was first played in September 1852 at the museum in Troy, New York, with G. C. Howard, manager of the theatre, as St. Clare, Mrs Howard as Topsy, and their daughter Cordelia as Eva, ran for a hundred nights before it was transferred to Albany and then to the National, New York, where it was performed for over two hundred successive times. During the latter part of this run it was given eighteen times a week, the company eating their meals in costume behind the scenes. One remarkable difference between the book and the play must be noted. Mrs Beecher Stowe's last chapter states such facts as, "B—— Furniture-maker; twenty years in this city; worth ten thousand dollars, all his own earnings; a Baptist", which cannot be dramatized. Playwrights had to fall back on their own resources here. For the Howards' version Aiken devised a most effective finale to solemn music. George Shelby covers Uncle Tom with his cloak, and kneels over him. Clouds work on and conceal them, and then work off:

Gorgeous clouds, tinted with sunlight. Eva, robed in white, is discovered on the back of a milk-white dove, with expanded wings, as if soaring upward. Her hands are extended in benediction over St. Clare and Uncle Tom, who are kneeling and gazing up to her. Expressive music. Slow curtain.

Heaven itself was thus dramatized. Such was the prestige of the story that nobody protested. Angels, of course, were customary—they carried off the soul of Marguerite and formed part of the Victorian scheme for festive decorations—but to represent Paradise went so strongly against propriety that stage settings on this subject at scores of theatres, including Astley's, Queen's, Victoria, City, and Britannia, testify to the power of Mrs Stowe. The cooling of enthusiasm left qualms. Revivals of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in later years "on a scale of splendour never before attempted" showed less presumption. When "Crowds of Real American Freed Slaves" brought a version from Booth's Theatre, New York, to the Princess's, their high jinks made the Harvest Home

"the most novel, exciting, and interesting scene ever produced in this country". Fairly small type served for the beautiful and impressive allegorical tableau of "Eva in Heaven" and then instead of the old venturesome spirit the management stopped short at "The Beautiful Gates Ajar". Feelings had become so sensitive on this subject that anything to do with angels on the stage was reverently called "allegorical", though posters displayed the mighty, naked limbs of winged beings who bore out the heavy man's reference to "muscleful heaven".

## ACT XIV. SCENE II

*Bourcicault's Octoroon and Colleen Bawn*

**B**RING back to mind *Blackbeard; or, The Captive Princess*. That dumbshow drama of the Surrey-side in 1798 is the germ of Wallack's, a New York theatre prominent in this story. James William Wallack helped to make a crowd in *Blackbeard* when his age was seven years. In *Cora; or, The Virgin Of The Sun*, the next year, his mother was the Virgin, his father the King, and his sister a Flower Girl. Master Wallack was not billed until 1806 when he played Orphan Boy in *The False Friend* and Guardian Genius in *The Cloud King*. "Cradled in a theatre, nursed in a green-room and suckled at a side-scene" sums up his early history. He ran barefoot among the slums of Lambeth but he was splendidly equipped for the stage. Expert training was added to natural advantages. The Wallacks were the handsomest family known to fame and he was their pride. Even though he did "refuse to dress unless his room was lit with wax", there was neither vanity nor arrogance in him. He upheld that tradition of the theatre which made its leading men princes, matching the luxuriousness of their personal habits with a munificence towards all unsuccessful members of their calling. Yet in London Wallack never had his deserts. The most niggardly of his critics assert that. From his early twenties, when he played Richmond, Macduff,

Wilford, and other seconds at Drury Lane to Kean, he could quote, "You see I'm somebody though you make nobody of me". According to Oxberry's Dramatic Biography, London did not foster actors: "To be great in London—you must come great to London—fame acquired in the metropolis will never give you popularity in that metropolis". But there is a more convincing explanation. Under the dominance of class consciousness London's leading actors were gentlemanly; no one could say of them that they had run about slums barefoot. There was no prejudice against the stage, for actors' sons were admitted into polite society provided they had been gently nurtured. "Our hero", Oxberry says, "passed his youth in poverty. He received a common education." That damned him.

As Henry Wallack had gone to America and did not appear on the London stage until he was nearly forty, and as the father somehow disappeared from the footlights although he lived to a ripe old age, the "Mr Wallack" whose name appears on so many English prints and playbills in the early nineteenth century is James. His first visit to America was triumphant. On his second he was injured in a fall, and returned to London to play the agonized student in *Presumption; or, The Fate Of Frankenstein* in 1823. Back in New York he took over the National with Henry as his stage-manager and Henry's son, James William Wallack II (billed as J. William Wallack in London), as a promising juvenile lead—until the theatre was burned down in 1839. After another visit to England, when he made a stir with his acting at the Princess's, James began in 1852 the real work of his life by making Wallack's on Broadway equally famous for low prices and high comedy. Four years previously his son, Lester Wallack, had been brought from London for the Broadway Theatre, where he had acted as "John Lester", in company with his cousin. Now, as a New York favourite, he joined Wallack's, no matter what site it might occupy, for life.

Since this chronicle follows the trend of popular taste little will be said about the main achievements of the American stage. Audiences from New York to New Orleans consisted of experienced playgoers, unbiased and appreciative. Both Cooke and Kean

were gladly welcomed until through drunkenness they began to break faith, which is, by the theatre's own standard, unforgivable. Wallack was applauded by them not as an idol of melodrama but in classic rôles; as leading man of Drury Lane he made no favourable impression, until he played Rolla, upon a hard-bitten generation that had lived through the greatest age of acting the world had ever known or was ever likely to know. Hooliganism was habitual at the Theatre Royal and theatrical management before long deserved nothing better. Many English actors went to America and many—Barrymore, Booth, Conway, Drew, and Jefferson as well as the Wallacks—stayed there. Signs appeared that stage ascendancy might cross the Atlantic. Its beginning might have been the log-playhouse built by General Burgoyne in captivity for his troops.

The quick victory of the Wallacks and the Booths was not for the Jeffersons, whose adventures as barnstormers form inspiring chapters in "The Autobiography of Joseph Jefferson". The reproductions of his landscapes which illustrate his books show that he was no ordinary painter. Yet no matter how great his power with pen and brush, he was an actor through and through, with an imaginative sensitiveness to leaven the hard training gained while playing to all manner of audiences. Some, never having seen make-believe before, warned the villain not to interfere and swore the lovers should not be parted. Between villages and cities stretched roads which became impassable in winter, and rivers of ice which threatened to crack as the company travelled over them by sledge. They bought a barge, and floated down the Cumberland River to the Ohio. From a hickory pole they hung a drop-scene for sail. As passenger-boats steamed past "we would first show them the wood scene, and then suddenly swing the sail round, exhibiting the glorious palace" while leading man and low comedian would meet in broadsword combat. On a long rainy day in the country Jefferson climbed into the loft of a barn to read "The Life and Letters of Washington Irving". His pride in finding himself mentioned there set him thinking of Rip Van Winkle as an American story for an American actor. But what could be done dramatically with so simple a sketch? All existing versions

were in two acts. He planned a play in three acts by elaborating Rip Van Winkle's meeting with Hudson's spectral crew into an act by itself. Remembering how "dreadfully human" their voices had sounded, he decided they should merely gesticulate and only Rip should speak. When this play was acted in Washington, he was quite sure that the character was what he had been seeking and that the play was not. He shelved it for five years.

More stage immigrants arrived. Dion Bourcicault and Agnes Robertson, now married, opened their tour at Montreal in the autumn of 1853. Directly they reached New York, their welcome was so warmhearted that he told his audience he would stay in America a long time "if they would let him". There he wrote and adapted several plays, including *Louis XI*. At the beginning of 1855 he returned to London temporarily to sell this to Charles Kean, and another play to Drury Lane. In America he called his wife "Miss Agnes Robertson", and kept away from the theatres, because he thought that an unmarried woman would draw more money. Convinced that he was wrong when he knew the country better, he proclaimed his marriage from the stage at Boston and settled down as a family man. There is a great difference between his earlier and his later American plays. *Grimaldi; or, The Life Of An Actress*, acted with the author in the title part at New Orleans in 1855, was a penny dreadful. Grimaldi, not the English Clown but scion of the ancient Italian family, works at the Theatre Royal, Nottingham, as lamp-lighter, door-keeper, super. He adopts a beggar-girl, who is abducted in the manner favoured by G. W. M. Reynolds. Yet the piece was acted at Wallack's—let for the year.

Fresh from the Ambigu, *Les Pauvres De Paris* became Stirling Coyne's *Fraud And Its Victims* at the Surrey and R. Barrett's *Pride And Poverty* at the Strand in 1857. Boucicault's version at Wallack's was billed as *The Poor Of New York, set down by the ... .. Club*. Lester played the Badger, eye-witness of a murder which reduces a wealthy family to poverty and makes the criminal's children rich, until the one man who knows the secret returns from foreign parts to put things right, following a snow-storm in Union Square and a fire in a tenement. After a long run

*The Poor Of New York*

Wallack's 1857

this piece gave place to Dion Bourcicault's *Jessie Brown; or, The Relief Of Lucknow*, with Lester in Highland uniform, Agnes Robertson as the heroine, and the author as Nana Sahib. Six outstanding successes were won by Bourcicault's plays during the New York season of 1859-60. The first was *Dot*, adapted from "The Cricket on the Hearth", with Agnes Robertson in the name part. Joseph Jefferson, who played Caleb Plummer, thought ill of the Winter Garden where the piece opened that September. Some sharp-pointed tropical plants of an inhospitable and sticky character exuded their "medicinal gums" in the vestibule, and the dress circle was festooned with artificial flowers so rare that they must have been unknown to the science of botany. To give these delicate exotics a sweet and natural odour, they were, he says, plentifully besprinkled with some perfume resembling closely the sweet scent of hair-oil. Here in October Bourcicault wrote and produced a new burlesque, and then *Smikey*, with himself as Mantalini, his wife as Smikey, and Jefferson as Newman Noggs.

With the instinct of a showman Bourcicault now turned to the topic that was firing the public passion. North and South be-



*The Creole; or, Love's Fetters*

Lyceum 1847

came embittered over the bloody Kansas Elections held in 1856 to decide whether slavery was to be legal there. Riots led to the battle where John Brown's forces were defeated by the slavers. There was further trouble when the claiming of Dred Scott as a slave in free territory was upheld by a majority of judges. Mrs Beecher Stowe wrote "Dred" and that was speedily dramatized. In the October of 1859, John Brown seized the arsenal on the borders of Virginia and Maryland, and held out against the military until the place was stormed. On December 2 he was hanged. The Howards were now on their way back to New York to present *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for the first time on Broadway. Bourcicault struck first. At the Winter Garden on December 5 he presented *The Octoroon; or, Life In Louisiana*, which owed its central idea to Shirley Brooks' *The Creole; or, Love's Fetters*, staged at London's Lyceum in 1847. Sensation was invented by Bourcicault in his handling of familiar situations. George, Mrs Peyton's nephew, back from Europe, finds that the family plantation has come to ruin through the knavery of M'Closky, a former overseer who now owns half the estate. Things have been made

worse through the unworkable inventions of Salem Scudder, a Yankee overseer played by Jefferson. Zoe, natural daughter of the late Judge Peyton, is accosted by M'Closky with honourable intentions until he discovers another way of winning her while he is prying into the dead man's desk. "Surely that is the judgment under which this estate is now advertised for sale—(takes up paper and examines it) yes, 'Thibodeaux against Peyton, 1838'. Hold on! What! This is worth taking too; in this desk the Judge used to keep one paper I want—this should be it. (Reads) 'The free papers of my daughter Zoe, registered February 4, 1841'. Why, Judge, wasn't you lawyer enough to know that while a judgment stood against you, it was a lien on your slaves? Zoe is your child by a quadroon slave, and you didn't free her; blood, if this is so, she's mine." He robs the Peytons of their last hope by stealing a draft for a large sum and buys Zoe at auction. But a broken camera has photographed his theft. He sets light to the turpentine barrels in the Magnolia, and comes out in a glare of red, boasting of his devilry, only to be confronted by a Redskin in full war paint. As the villain is being dragged along the ground and repeatedly stabbed, the ship blows up. Bourcicault was out to please both sides, for, as Jefferson points out, his characters spoke in favour of the South, while the story went against it. When the old negro, just before the slave sale, calls his coloured "bredrin" around him and tells them they must look their best so as to bring a good price for the "missis", sympathy was felt for the loving hearts of the South. When people realized that the darky was a slave, they became abolitionists to a man. When Zoe, the loving octoroon, is offered to the highest bidder, and a warm-hearted Southern girl offers all her fortune to buy Zoe and release her, the audience cheered for the South. When she was bartered for, they cheered for the North.

The Bourcicaults' share of the profits was over a thousand dollars, but they demanded higher salaries and went, because of a refusal, to Laura Keane's theatre. They appeared with her in Bourcicault's *Jeannie Deans*, which was highly profitable, and next in his latest French piece, which failed. While they were walking along Broadway to their hotel, he ran down five or six

steps to the second-hand bookstall in a basement. Holding up a copy of Gerald Griffin's "The Collegians", he asked, "Do you know anything about this?" Mrs Bourcicault answered that it was founded on the ballad of "Willy Riley and his Colleen Bawn", and he paid ten cents for it. That night, after the theatre, she threw herself on the bed, while he made notes and a scenario for the first act. By noon the scene plots were ready. The piece was written, rehearsed, and produced in nine days.

There is a possibility that Bourcicault did not know that the story had already been staged. Though the name of Gerald Griffin was well known, the irony of his career had not been noted. It epitomized the nineteenth-century way of wasting a good bone in vain desires for the moon in the river. Griffin struggled desperately to win fame as a tragic poet instead of writing plays about the ordinary human things of his early life in Ireland. Until the age of seven he lived in Limerick. Then in 1810 his family moved to Fairy Lawn on the Shannon. In a lovely setting his dreams of becoming a poet were encouraged by his mother's understanding and sympathy. At eighteen he wrote a tragedy in verse and set out for London. There he lived hard and starved, destroyed his drama and wrote another, called *Gissipus*, which remained unacted until after his death. When disappointment made him take up fiction, his Irish tales were thrown off from hour to hour as demanded by the printer, without any signs of haste. In 1830 he became a monk and died in Cork ten years later, by which time scenes and characters from his books had become an established part of the Victorian stage. Some of his "Tales of the Munster Festivals" were successfully dramatized, more especially "Suil Dhuv The Coiner", which can be discerned under several changes of names and scene. In 1828 he used the legend of an Irish crime in his novel "The Collegians", which three years later became Egerton Wilks' first play. As *Eily O'Connor*; or, *The Foster Brothers* it was played at the City with Buckstone and the future Mrs Charles Kean in the cast. After a run of fifty nights it was taken on tour by Vining, who contrived to make Hardress Cregan acceptable as a star. At the City the demand for it persisted and *Eily O'Connor* was written, by J. T. Haines, as a substitute.

*GOLD! by Charles Reade*

Drury Lane 1853

The story was also familiar in New York, for Louisa H. Medina had dramatized the novel at the Bowery in 1842. But Bourcicault, even though he dedicated his version to Griffin's memory, improved the plot considerably. For one thing he preferred a happy ending, and for another he wanted to exhibit his own talents; both purposes were served by his celebrated character of Myles-na-Coppaleen. In a note to Miss Keene on the playbills of *The Colleen Bawn; or, The Brides Of Garryowen*, he claimed that the play, his first attempt to write about his native country, had been completed in five days. For the first time he signs himself Boucicault, without the "r" which in London had caused an unscrupulous punster to couple him with "poor sick colt".

Wild Irish scenery delighted New York at Laura Keene's on March 27, 1860. By Killarney's lakes and fells, the crippled Danny, Hardress's devoted slave, is about to destroy Eily's wedding lines. This is prevented by the drunken, good-for-nothing Myles-na-Coppaleen. Knowing how desperate the plight of the Cregans has become, Danny lures Eily into his skiff, sails half-way across the lake, and seeks shelter in the Devil's Island cave as a storm bursts. This was the sensation scene, with gauze all over the stage to represent transparent waters through which the little

boat worked, while moonlight beyond the cave's entrance shone on Killarney. Danny made Eily land on a flat rock, demanded the wedding certificate, and when she pleaded with him, pushed her backwards into the water. She clung to the rock. He pushed her off. There was a shot. Danny fell. Myles, looking out from his whiskey-still in the cave's roof, had fired at what he took to be an otter. Here on the first night the act drop was lowered. After a week or two the excitement was prolonged. Myles came down a ladder, saw Eily, dived into the gauze, and came to the surface with her on his arm. When in the last act Hardress was about to be arrested in the midst of the bridal party, she arrived to save him from the gallows. Laura Keene stood unselfishly on one side; the advantage of playing Anne, the second bride, was that she provided scope for social airs and graces, but even this chance was lost when Colleen Bawn had natural dignity. According to no less a witness than Bernard Shaw, "Mrs Boucicault was always hopelessly ladylike, and usually made Hardress Cregan's complaints of her rusticity ridiculous by being more refined than he". The author is described in the same critique as "a coaxing, blandishing sort of liar, to whom you could listen without impatience long enough to allow the carpenters time to set the most elaborate water-scene behind the front cloth".

## ACT XIV. SCENE III

*Mockery for Pocahontas; sympathy for Leah*

IN the United States popular imagination was at war with itself. What was distinctively American clashed with what ardently hankered after old nobility. The same audiences which applauded military spectacles to celebrate Washington's victories on land and the naval engagements of 1812 were moved by dramas of Kotzebue where, in Professor Odell's words, "anybody, however humbly reared, turns out to be noble or royal

according to matrimonial plans and the exigencies of a happy final curtain”.

At length the American stage discovered its own tragic actor in Forrest, and at length he discovered his own tragic plays. *Metamora*; or, *The Last Of The Wampanoags* was prompted by a prize for the best tragedy in five acts “of which the hero, or principal character, shall be an original of this country”. It was popular, but not more than *The Gladiator* which was billed as “the American tragedy” though Spartacus was the hero and Ancient Rome the scene. Here the acting was the thing. There was new feeling in it, not merely because Forrest was “of this country” but because his muscles, bulging like the rotundities of nineteenth-century mahogany, were eloquent of virility. Here was a form that could win respect from miners and cowboys for a classic warrior who went about in short skirts.

In its secret heart the American public was even more hopelessly romantic than the British. The Englishman’s nostalgia was concerned with time, the Yankee’s with time and place. Sylvanus Cobb, son of a theologian who wrote under the same name, exploited this in the serials he wrote for “The Ledger”. There were Redskins in “The Mystic Bride; or, The Exiles of Manhattan”, but the craze he began was for historical tales with European settings. The Bowery was the house for plays like these. In one season it presented *The Gunmaker Of Moscow*, *The Idiot Of Normandy*, *The Blacksmith Of Ghent*, and *The Shoemaker Of Toulouse*. The first was seen by the wife of Sam Cowell, the comic singer, at Pittsburg. As described in her diary it had a baron in high wig and beard in three ringlets, who was always demanding that his ward should “retire to her chamber” even while wandering about in the streets. A fat priest, always in everybody’s way, turned out to be Peter the Great, Tsar of Russia. The waiting-maid was a thorough Yankee, and spoke always in the style of, “Oh, miss, that fat priest is sich a sight, and when he laughs his *stummock* do shake so!” The future brought *The Muleteer Of Toledo* (one of Charles Kean’s productions at the Princess’s) and *The Venetian Buccaneer* among others of the type. Ned Buntline’s pirate stories from “The New York Mercury” were as eagerly dramatized. In the summer



*Chaufrau as Mose*

From Scribner's, July 1879

of 1859 a New Bowery ran in rivalry with the Old Bowery to double the demand. Mrs Southworth's serials upheld domesticity, more particularly "Rose Elmer; or, A Divided Heart and a Divided Life", which was a hint that the village heroine would become a duchess. Some fifteen years earlier Celeste had divided her soul at the Bowery into Miranda, daughter of Virtue, and Heart, daughter of Evil, in *Temptation; or, The Devil's Daughter*.

Patriotic hunger could not feed for ever on the last of the

Mohicans or Wampanoags. Popular imagination did want to see the national virtues invested in a national type, and was not duped when an enterprising manager took *The Purse; or, The Benevolent Tar* from London and turned it into *The Purse; or, The American Tar*. What Dr Bird of Philadelphia saw in Spartacus was a manifestation of the unshakeable spirit which bound all his countrymen together. Perhaps it could be called the only spirit which bound all his countrymen together. What even the Americans themselves did not fully realize was that they had caused "country" to mean something it had never meant before. They were literally the United States, a definition as well as a name. From which was the national type to be chosen? Each state could produce its representative as easily as each country in Europe could; and possibly at an earlier or a later stage in Columbia's history a portrait might be drawn of a man so formed as to feel at home from New England to New Mexico. Midway through the nineteenth century there was no such possibility. Compare the entertainments of New York and New Orleans with those of San Francisco; the results will show what this means. *Mazeppa*, with any shapely or unshapely feminine form bound to the unfiery, tamed steed which clambered up a rake to the back of the scenery, was applauded from coast to coast. Opera companies were welcomed everywhere, as the opera houses of goldrush cities proved. Music linked Denver with Boston. What else? No serious actor was acclaimed from coast to coast. Even Forrest, whose mighty lungs impressed lumbermen in places remote from the cities where people knew what Shakespeare was all about, sometimes met critics too sophisticated for him or pioneers too unsophisticated.

Yet the playgoer who thought of himself as an ordinary American wanted to see an ordinary American on the stage. If he applauded Russian gunmakers and Caribbean pirates, it was because he had turned in despair from unsatisfying realities in plays from London that meant less to him than frank unrealities. Great pleasure was caused when Broadway's Olympic in 1848 gave birth to Mose, the Bowery Boy in the dress of a volunteer fireman. In a sketch called *A Glance At New York* a Jewish actor,



*W. J. Florence as the Hon. Bardwell Slote in The Mighty Dollar*

From Scribner's, July 1879

Chanfrau, made Mose in his red shirt and stovepipe hat so much to the audience's liking that about a dozen plays were written round the same character. At Philadelphia the young fireman was called Jakey, which indicates that the celebrity of Mose was local. Firemen's red shirts, almost a national costume, were not Federal passports for New Yorkers.

Some more general type had to be found. What success the endeavour had was recorded by Scribner's in 1879. An anonymous article by a critic of very exceptional discernment states, "If we cast a rapid glance over the stage of the United States, seeking to see what class of drama succeeds best and lasts longest, it is soon evident that a piece in which the most prominent

feature is the exhibition of an American type has the greatest chance of gaining popular approval. It may be the American of fact, as our Southern friend, Colonel Mulberry Sellers, or his Eastern relative, Judge Bardwell Slote, or it may be the American of legend, as the immortal Rip Van Winkle of our own Hudson, or the stalwart Davy Crockett of the West—for although Crockett was once an actual entity he is now no more than the immaterial excuse for an infinity of legend. Plays without this central or locally characteristic personage—plays of French or English or German, or even now and then of American authorship—may seem for a time to be the fashion; but they rarely wear as well as the cheaper and less artistic homespun. That the most of these American products are crude and unrefined, merely the raw material out of which a skilful artificer might make a symmetrical masterpiece, admits of no dispute. An apt epigram is afloat ascribed to Mr Boucicault—to the effect that ‘all that the Americans seem to recognize as dramatic here is the caricature of character, and that is what the successful plays are—caricature of eccentric character set in a weak dramatic framework’. This, like most epigrams, is a smart setting of a half-truth. Americans recognize the character through the caricature, accepting the latter only for lack of the former”.

The difficulty of the playwright's task was plain enough. One success makes it still plainer. Solon Shingle, who satisfied a wide enough demand, was not the invention of one carefully calculating brain. He came into being through a peculiar process which might almost be a series of accidents. What his original author intended was soon ignored. Actors put him together piece by piece while in contact with audiences. The story is told by that anonymous critic in Scribner's. While looking over MS. plays, Chanfrau found *The People's Lawyer*, a two-act comedy by Dr J. S. Jones, of Boston, a prolific playwright. Knowing that it contained a Yankee part, played originally by an old actor named Spear, and performed afterwards by Hill, he showed it to Burke. Spear and Hill had played Solon Shingle as “a sort of young and Yankee Paul Pry”. Burke, bringing to all his work a precious faculty of seeing and thinking for himself, appeared as an old and

*One American of legend*

From Scribner's, July 1879

simple-minded Massachusetts farmer, intent on "his bar'l o' apple-sass". In 1854 *Solon Shingle* was acted at the Baltimore Museum by John E. Owens, and ten years later at the Old Broadway. It was now a direct and simple picture of a homely New England farmer, "loquacious, inquisitive, shrewd in a measure, full of his own importance".<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps it is not to be wondered at that what was distinctively American (and what was welcomed as such) should have been supplied by an Englishman. *Our American Cousin* made a fair bid at holding the mirror up to the general public of the United States. Whether the author was playing to the gallery as no gallery had ever been played to before, or whether he was an honest democrat who wished to make cause with rough-and-ready manners against effete mannerisms, is worth arguing even though the point cannot be decided. Tom Taylor came from a stock who do not give themselves away. He was a Northumbrian, educated at Glasgow. He could turn his hand to anything from professorships to Civil Service secretaryships. Nothing very human can be seen in photographs, drawings, and caricatures of Taylor, for his face hides behind beard and spectacles. Private letters are equally baffling. His child dies and he gives the facts about hours and avoirdupois; it seems callous until you realize that the usual expressions of grief would seem callous to one who believed in the decency of keeping private feelings strictly private. His list of works is in keeping. Collaboration with Charles Reade in *Masks And Faces* is balanced by "The Local Government Act, 1858, etc." and that by "The Railway Station, painted by W. P. Frith described". He published a history of Leicester Square and a volume of historical dramas in verse. What neither he nor the biographical dictionary thinks worth separate mention are his plays of contemporary life, including at least two out of a hundred that were so successful that their titles became household words. Melodrama was universally despised and its respectable author shared the feeling. Old playgoers who enjoyed Tom Taylor's popular successes, still to this day consider that he wrote nothing else as "good" as *'Tisixt Axe And Crown*. Snobbery swamped all judgment. An historical drama in blank verse must be better than a non-historical play of conversational quality in the same way that a royal mummy can be worth more than an ordinary living man.

Tom Taylor's historical dramas are pretentiously dead. *Our American Cousin* is unassumingly quick with the sentiment of its times. It began as mere gold-digging prompted by a business instinct which knew that money was to be made in America. It

*Another American of legend*

From Scribner's, July 1879

was hawked round New York in 1858 by an agent who was lucky enough to find Laura Keane at a loss because lagging scene-painters had upset her Shakespeare plans. Jefferson, in her company, was the very man for Asa Trenchard from Vermont who visits Trenchard Manor just in time to save Sir Edward Trenchard from ruin and his daughter from forced marriage to the unjust

steward. To keep his cousin Mary from poverty Asa burns the will that leaves their grandfather's fortune to himself, and he withholds a bottle of hair-dye until its influential owner promises to make the Admiralty do something for the sailor who loves another fair cousin. There is nothing but nonsense in the plot and nothing much more in the dialogue, but each character is so well-marked that a reader always knows to whom every line belongs. Tom Taylor cannot take the entire credit; the book of the play ("Printed but not published 1869") is the prompt copy from Laura Keane's Theatre as the players had altered it to please themselves. Asa is rather Jefferson's handwriting than Taylor's. Lord Dundreary is too extravagant a piece of stage buffoonery to have been soberly created by a self-respecting man of letters. Even if Tom Taylor did write this:

*Dundreary:* Oh, I thought you meant those creatures with wigs on them.

*Florence:* Wigs!

*Dundreary:* I mean those things that move, breathe and walk, they look like animals with those things. (Moving his arms like wings.)

*Florence:* Wings.

*Dundreary:* Birds with wings, that's the idea.

even if that passage had come straight from the original script, one may still disbelieve that the author introduced the "business" of knocking knees against chairs and bumping into people. When Sothern was asked to play the character it was, according to Lester Wallack, "a part of forty or fifty lines, a sort of second old man", and the plot would logically require an elderly crochety peer, too aged for warm-blooded feelings. The English actor changed him into a caricature of the fops of Fops' Alley, which had the effect of making Asa appear all the more virile and virtuous. New York audiences liked the joke so much that Dundreary became the central character and the play took still more plainly the imprint of its day. The scene where Asa unpacks his "two shirts, three bosoms" and indulges the "enquiring spirit of an American citizen" by examining Lord Dundreary's Golden Fluid points a moral that all the tomfoolery emphasizes. But this was lost when what was intended as a drama became (in the manner of *L'Auberge Des Adrêts*) a farce. When Sothern brought the

*John E. Owens as Solon Shingle*

From Scribner's, July 1879

piece to the Haymarket, Buckstone put up the notice on the first night because it was "an offence to all the swells". Mathews, who knew more about swells, argued that it would please them better than anybody else. In London *Our American Cousin* ran for four hundred nights, and Dundreary whiskers came into fashion.

As the "average American" had more and more opportunities of seeing himself in song and story, the Redskin lost his glamour. "The Song of Hiawatha" was the swan-song of la belle sauvage. In that same year, 1855, John Brougham wrote his burlesque of *Po-Ca-Hon-Tas! or, The Gentle Savage*, which was her death-blow. After the public had enjoyed this joke at Wallack's,

Miamis, Wepts, and all other huntresses of the Mississippi were laughed off the stage. It was acclaimed as the best burlesque in any language, but as what the nineteenth century accepted as burlesque appealed to minds acutely responsive to melodrama, nobody living now can set himself up as a judge—nobody can decide what is best or worst in a style of humour which never touches a modern mind except by accident. John Brougham, as H. J. Pow-Ha-Tan the 1st, spoke these lines:

Well *roared* indeed, my jolly Tuscaroras,  
Most loyal *Corps*, your King *encores* the *Chorus*.

and sang an Irish song, which was followed by an argument about soft soap in the manner of the law courts. When there is a "row outside", the King asks:

Sergeant at *arms*, say, what *alarms* the crowd?  
*Loud noise annoys* us, why is it *allowed*?

Captain John Smith arrives and the puns are more simple-minded still:

What *manner of man* are you? A fillybustero!  
Your *name an' aim*? What brought you *here*, me *hero*?

Smith escapes and hides himself in a girls' school where Pocahontas aids him and answers her angry father with:

The king who would enslave his daughter so  
Deserves a hint from Mrs Beecher Stowe.

The husband chosen for her is a yodeller. She is rescued by Smith and when he is trussed, as in the painting, she leads in the archery class to form hollow-square around him. There is a hand of cards, set to music, to decide who shall have her, and at the end Smith exclaims:

I have *won fairly*, I appeal to you.  
And *fair one*, I have *fairly won you*, too  
So let us *two* make *one*.

As a romp all this is very merry; as satire of far-reaching effect its lack of point or wit in the twentieth century indicates some unknown quality in the imagination of the nineteenth century. Why was the mere guying of legends such a very good joke? The explanation is like the explanation of mediæval profanities:



you would need the mediæval sense of religion to enjoy the feast of fools. Similarly, however much less the degree, you would need to respect the social standing of titled fops in weepers to be able to laugh aloud at Lord Dundreary. The very same principle may be involved when it comes to Brougham's burlesque. Its audiences still found some emotional appeal in Pocahontas. Audiences that laughed at Burnand's *Black-Eyed Susan*; or, *The Little Bill That Was Taken Up*, still enjoyed Jerrold's *Black-Eyed Susan* as a contemporary play.

No sooner had Pocahontas' reign ended on the stage than the spirit of la belle sauvage appeared in Jewish form. *Leah, The Forsaken* was the play and this brings some important new personages into the chronicle. One is Hezekiah Linthicum Bateman, a strict Methodist, who became stage-struck, married an actress and had a lot of stage children. After learning how to be a manager at the expense of his unfortunate relations-in-law, the Cowells, he began a career that was to become of historic importance in London. Meanwhile his infant prodigies, with their Shakespearean impersonations, found an impresario in Barnum. Kate Bateman, later known as Mrs Crowe, was the eldest daughter; she was born in 1843 and was a star at nineteen years. There was then a dramatic critic, aged twenty-four; his mind, set upon the stage, saw opportunity. Kate Bateman needed a play and he had translated Mosenthal's *Deborah* which was stirring Germany and the Germans in America. At the Howard Athenæum, Boston, on Dec. 9, 1862, Bateman presented *Leah, The Forsaken* by Augustin Daly. The heroine was Miss Bateman and the villain, Nathan, an apostate Jew, was J. W. Wallack, junr. The scene is an Austrian village in the early eighteenth century. Leah, who is loved by Rudolf, the magistrate's son, agrees to leave the helpless Jews she is protecting and go with him to America. Nathan undertakes to bribe her to leave and falsely swears that she has accepted the money. Rudolf marries Madalena and is cursed, he and his children, by Leah; but on her return four years later she owes so much to Madalena's protection that she blesses their child. As the curtain falls to music demi-slow, she is "going off slowly and feebly while Rudolf, Madalena, and Child kneel. Nathan, bound, cowers in on side".

There will be no death for this literary tradition, but its nineteenth-century vogue ended when another Abdelazer in modern dress swore revenge upon Christian society because his wife had been dishonoured in the manner of Miss Cassy. James Schönberg, the author, charged melodrama with great violence. "Sensational" was how he labelled *Oscar The Half Blood*, and so it was throughout the three hours and forty minutes of its performances at Wood's Theatre, New York, in 1867. Oscar pushes Lord Bury into a crevasse and personates him, only to be confronted by a slave-owner whom he ruined in revenge: "My wife was, as you know, beautiful; your friend remarked it, and you, being in a generous mood, said, 'If you like her, take her as a present. She is yours'." When Lord Bury returns cheerfully and unresentfully from the crevasse, Oscar drinks a pearl dissolved in a glass of Cyprus wine and dies in the midst of the sumptuous ball he has given in honour of a heroine who now exclaims, "What might he not have become, had he been born free!"

For many years more *Uncle Tom's Cabin* thrived upon the stage and prompted many imitations. Imagination still responded strongly to the needs of the oppressed. When *The Slave's Revenge* was being played at Portsmouth in 1866, seamen from H.M.S. Hector were in the pit. One of them, when the planter tried to spurn the slave with his foot, jumped on to the stage. The planter fled. "Kick a man when he's down? Not if I know it", said the seaman as he took the slave in his arms.

## *Speech in front of the curtain*

**O**LD playbills, Press cuttings, crown posters; sheets of Penny Plain, Twopence Coloured; scrap albums, carte-de-visite photographs, programmes, special performance souvenirs; salvage from illustrious waste-paper-baskets, worn out prompt copies; obsolete title-deeds, bundles of holograph letters, auctioneers' catalogues; engravings and the copper-plates from which they were printed; oil-paintings, rough sketches; odd numbers of periodicals; penny plays and penny dreadfuls; junk that had been bought, begged, borrowed (rarely) and even stolen by burglarious entry—these provided material for *Blood and Thunder*. The author, therefore, begs to be excused the shortcomings of his documentary. Fortunately most inquiries can be satisfied elsewhere. Professor Allardyce Nicoll's "XIX Century Drama 1800-1850" supplies the bibliography in a Hand List of Plays that could not be attempted here except in a separate volume of appendices. Such works as John Parker's "Who's Who in the Theatre" and Professor Odell's "Annals of the New York Stage" have been constantly in use, besides the many books of reference issued by "The Stage" under its devoted editors whose chair S. R. Littlewood now adorns. Acknowledgment should also be paid to many playgoers, dead and gone, whose lifelong accumulations of odds-and-ends all helped to fill the remote farmhouse where this was written with history in the raw.

Even were all documents neatly numbered and cited, there would still remain the debt to unrecorded hours with the players. Many of these were spent at the Open Air Theatre which Sydney Carroll installed in Regent's Park; the rule excluding all but members of the company from the canvas Green Room was overcome by casting the outsider for unseen, disembodied characters such as Helena's father, Nedar, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Midsummer nights and midsummer matinees passed in talk about

theatre yesterdays with Robert Atkins, who had spent his life acting or staging Shakespeare. The reminiscences of W. E. Holloway went back so far as to create bewilderment until he explained that stage conditions in Australia when his career began approximated to conditions in England of a much earlier date. He knew all the regular "business" of Victorian melodrama, and could demonstrate the difference between "round eights" and "Glasgow tens" in broadsword combats. A lecture by Mr Holloway at King's College, Strand, gave some measure of his knowledge of the past, but odd moments at the Open Air Theatre were better still. On his first visit to Regent's Park his father (Richard III at the Lyceum during Irving's illness) pointed out the canal bridge, original of the scene in *The Lights O'London*, as a sight more or less in the list topped by the Bloody Tower. If gas floats flicker again in any preceding pages, the linstock was put to the jets by Mr Holloway during these leisure moments under the trees. The tale on many occasions has been taken up by Macqueen-Pope and Frank Collins in odd corners of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane; also by D. L. Murray in the wings of what might be called Theatre Royal, Memory Lane, for behind its pasteboard proscenium this maestro of the miniature conjured up the mighty images of *Timour The Tartar*, *The Miller And His Men*, *The Battle Of Waterloo* (with horses) and works of almost equal declamation and conflagration, each preceding a Christmas pantomime—all in the space of one or two cubic feet. No doubt this was how the imaginative powers of his historical novels were incubated, a theory which is strongly supported by the Juvenile Drama shop in "Trumpeter Sound". In Printing House Square, Mr Murray's romantic ardour found vent in outlining articles, the gist of which has been incorporated in these pages by courtesy of the Editor of "The Times Literary Supplement". Other memories pour gold into our plate. Marie Ault (Charlotte Cushman over again in face and spirit) recalls performances of plays that were new in the eighteenthies. In *The Beggar's Petition* she was the child who said the horse-cloth should be cut in two, half for the poor man, half for the rich man against his future need. "That", she says, "always brought down the house". Thanks must also be tendered to

## BLOOD AND THUNDER

Philip John Stead for bringing me a copy of *La Closerie De Genêts* which I had found hard to trace despite its prolonged spell of widespread popularity. Gratitude is owing to Sir Charles Cochran for taking the chair years ago when the author had been invited to speak on the subject of melodrama. An audience rarely enjoys itself so much. Each member of this one put the lecturer right—and rightly.

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